THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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DFOBIRDS.ORG

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Black-legged Kittiwake

Susan Rosine

Chatfield State Park
Jefferson County

FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's December already! . . . Wait — what? January?

Susan Blansett

I don't know where 2021 has gone, but I know I'm looking forward to 2022 . . . just as soon as we get through December. Right?

Yes, the date on the cover of this issue of *The Lark Bunting* (and at the bottom of each page) reads "JANUARY 2022." Like monthly magazines on newsstands, our Denver Field Ornithologists newsletter publishes a few weeks early. We do this not so much for "shelf life" but simply to be as forward-looking as possible.

But we also know you're likely to read this in December, so I know what's first on my list of things to talk about this issue: the **Denver Christmas Bird Count** on Dec. 18, 2021, the last best thing of the DFO year! YOU are missing out if you haven't participated in this end-of-year event, which is coordinated through DFO's online field trip registration system.

So, I urge you first to check out our updated story about this annual effort on page 10 of this issue. Then, go to the DFO Field Trip page and sign up for one of the 24 Christmas Count trips across suburban southwest Denver.

Need more encouragement? Here are my **Top 5 reasons to join the Denver CBC**:

5. Stake out a habitat you've never birded before with really good birders

4. "Community science" may *sound* dorky, but trust me —it's fun and a hoot

3. As warm as it's been lately, you may not even need your winter gear

2. A new life-list bird could be in it for you. It has been known to happen

   and (*drumroll, please*) the **No. 1 reason to join the Denver CBC:**

1. To show CBC coordinator and DFO bird whisperer **Joey Kellner** some LOVE! Joey has worked his tailfeathers off, and they're not that big to begin with!

Still looking forward, here's the second thing I eagerly anticipate in the new year: More monthly Zoom programs that help DFO reach larger audiences. Yeah! The 2021 program season (January through April, and August through November) ended as it started, with large turnouts via Zoom. (*What* pandemic?) Expect a repeat!

DFO Program Manager **Bill Turner** has cooked up a terrific lineup of speakers for January through April (check out those coming attractions in our program preview feature beginning on page 6 of this issue). And remember: You can watch most of DFO's previous speakers if you can't catch them in real time by clicking over to the Past Programs archive on the DFO website. How cool is *that*?

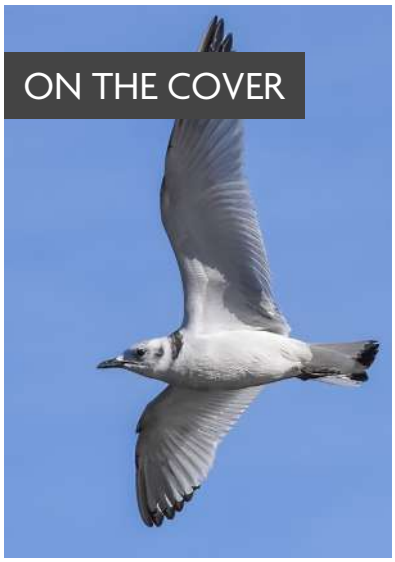
Next, I'm looking forward personally to a long-anticipated trip in February 2022 to Sax Zim Bog, northern Minnesota's winter haven for Great Gray Owls and Northern Hawk Owls, among other elusive species in those frozen northern latitudes. What lengths won't we go to for exciting birds of prey, am I right?

Fourth, I look forward in spring 2022 to climbing Dinosaur Ridge to join DFO's **Dave Hill** and our intrepid crew of HawkWatch community science volunteers again, starting in mid-March. Hiking up the ridge helps get me back in shape for summer. And 2021 was a banner year on the ridge, with more than 1,100 migrating raptors sighted, including increasing numbers of Broad-winged Hawks. What will 2022 bring? Come join us and find out! Dave will offer his superlative and fun HawkWatch training in February, so watch the next issue of *The Lark Bunting* for details about learning how to ID birds of prey at a distance. Once you've done it, you'll astound your friends like you wouldn't believe.

Finally, I look forward to more fabulous DFO field trips in 2022, near and far, both as a new trip leader myself, and a participant in trips led by others.

Until then, on behalf of the DFO Board and all who contribute to make our birding organization hum, here's to a fabulous and safe holiday season and Happy New Year 2022!

See you in the field,
— Susan



Two words stand out in the eBird profile of our "cover bird" this month, the Black-legged Kittiwake: *Rare inland*. So when FIVE of these ocean-going birds (they spend winter out there) are reported at FOUR different reservoirs and lakes along Colorado's Front Range within a month's time, birders and photographers — and *The Lark Bunting* — take note.

Lucky for us, DFO member **Susan Rosine** of Brighton captured perhaps the hardest view — in flight and vertical, a perfect fit for our cover — of this little gull with black wingtips that, as the eBird profile also notes, "look like they were dipped in ink."

"The bird was a lifer for me," said Rosine, who sees lots of species as a volunteer at the summer'/fall banding station at Barr Lake. "I had chased the species last year in Weld County, but never could locate it."

DFO member **Scott Somershoe**, who made it species No. 269 on his bicycle-only Green Big Year quest (he's now up to 280!), found Colorado's first Black-legged Kittiwake of 2021 on Nov. 1. Pedaling to Chatfield State Park on a dreary, 37-degree Monday, he pulled out his binoculars in the Plum Creek delta area on the Douglas County side of Chatfield Reservoir and spied the bird. "I'm shocked . . . I'm stunned. I'm also freezing," he recalled later in a blog post. "I check my Sibley and Merlin apps to make sure my brain isn't frozen, too." One hadn't been seen at Chatfield since 2004.

When Susan caught up with our cover bird 5 days later, on Nov. 6, it was still at Chatfield, but at the South Platte River delta on the Jefferson County side — and it was now TWO birds. Others had seen the pair, but strangely, when Rosine got there, she had the birds to herself. "The kittiwakes, other gulls, grebes, etc. were coming close . . . and the light was pretty darn perfect for picture-taking. I took tons of pictures."

The day after Somershoe's first discovery, teen birdmeister **Cole Sage** of Denver (he of the 405-species Colorado Big Year in 2020) spotted another at Cherry Creek SP. And on the first day of December, ace Pueblo County birder **Brandon Percival** found yet another on Horseshoe Lake at Lathrop SP in Huerfano County.

So, that's four birds at three places. Where's the fifth bird at the fourth?

The day after Rosine took tons of photos at Chatfield, she went birding up at Union Reservoir near Longmont in Weld County, and . . . uh-huh. She found *another* one. "Are you kidding me?" she wrote in the "Details" field of her eBird checklist.

Rosine seems to have a knack with rarities. "If you see the (eBird) rare bird reports for Adams County," she said, "I've had three White-winged Doves living on my property since July! I just saw them again yesterday."

Of course you did, Susan. Thanks for sharing your kittiwake with us.
— Patrick O'Driscoll

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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DFO NEWS

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share club news briefs, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life events, and pretty much any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany.* The Lark Bunting ***welcomes your contributions****. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor* ***Patrick O'Driscoll*** *at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

DFO SHUFFLES MEMBERSHIP, TREASURER DUTIES

The DFO Board has approved something of a three-way swap in club duties among DFO Treasurer **Sue Summers**, Membership Chair **Mary Cay Burger** and club member **Kathy Holland**. Summers, the club's financial officer for the past 6-plus years, was looking to try something different in her DFO volunteerism. Coincidentally, Burger was looking to step away from her longtime role overseeing DFO's membership program. Holland, with the bookkeeping skills to take over for Summers, expressed interest when DFO sought someone to run for treasurer in the DFO election next spring (treasurer is one of four elected offices with president, vice president and secretary). Figuring there's no time like the present, the three approached the DFO Board to bless the shuffle. At its quarterly meeting Nov. 17, the board voted to appoint Holland as interim treasurer (she will stand for election next April) and Summers as Membership Committee chair, effective immediately.

"I love DFO and our mission and look forward to introducing more people to the benefits of membership," Summers said. "We continue to grow, reaching a new high in membership numbers in 2021, I hope to help sustain and expand on that success in future years working with committee members like Mary Cay."

Holland, a DFO member since she retired in 2017, said she has "always liked numbers." Her day job was in natural gas marketing and risk analysis. But she also did payroll and kept the books for two fast-casual restaurants that her "retired" husband operated for about a decade — one in downtown Denver and one in Santal Fe, where they lived at the time.

Continued on page 5

Sue Summers, Membership Chair

Kathy Holland, New DFO Treasurer

Mary Cay Burger
Tom Burger

NEWS NOTES *cont from page 4*

Holland, whose family moved to Littleton from California when she was age 8, relocated with her husband to New Mexico 16 years ago and returned to the Denver area 3 years ago. "I had a huge list of things I wanted to do once I retired . . . but once I started birding, I've only done one of them."

Burger, known to most of us for her years of club membership work, has a long DFO past, having served on the board since 2001 and been both vice president and president. A retired pharmacist, she is a skilled birder and field trip leader, and has represented DFO in public outreach at fairs and festivals at Barr Lake State Park and other venues. No wonder that in 2017, she received DFO's highest honor, the Ptarmigan Award, for her many contributions.

Thank you, Mary Cay and Sue, and welcome to the team, Kathy!

MEMBERSHIP OFF THE CHARTS! HAVE YOU RENEWED YET?

In her final act as outgoing Membership chair, **Mary Cay Burger** informed the DFO Board that total enrollment in the club now stands at 582, with a 21 percent increase in membership in 2021 alone. "This year we have 104 new members," Burger reported. Here's the breakdown:

Total: 582 members (572 paid and 10 complimentary)
Family annual (electronic *Lark Bunting*): 551
Family annual (paper/mail *Lark Bunting*): 14
Student (26 and under): 7
Comp (electronic): 7
Comp (paper/mail): 3

Burger said that as of mid-November, members had begun to renew (annual membership expires Dec. 31), with 148 paid up for 2022. "We will be sending out renewal reminders," she added.

Which is where YOU, dear readers, come in: Have YOU renewed yet?

Whether you want to renew, join, or purchase a gift membership, the DFO website, https://dfobirds.org/, makes it easy:

- Go to the Membership page. You'll be prompted to log in (or create an account if you don't already have one). The benefits of membership are outlined there.

- Make your selections (*including optional donations, details below*). You can pay electronically through PayPal. You also can use a credit card without setting up a PayPal account, or you can send in a check.

While you're at it, consider that giving option to donate to either the **DFO Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund** or/and **Friends of DFO**, the club's general fund.

The grant fund provides thousands of dollars in financial aid each year for research and programs that support DFO's mission in Colorado. (*For a compelling explanation of why these grants are important, read the guest essay by a previous grant recipient on page 22 of this issue.*)

The Friends of DFO option supports club operating expenses, including all the activities that members enjoy, from monthly programs and *The Lark Bunting* newsletter to the club website with its touch-of-your-fingertips convenience in signing up for DFO's many field trips.

Thanks in advance for supporting DFO field trips, programs, and more with your membership dollars!

A DFO MILESTONE IN WASHINGTON COUNTY

On a Nov. 20 field trip led by **Diane Roberts** to several northeastern Colorado birding hotspots, Washington County became the 11th Colorado county where DFO has tallied at least 200 species on the club's eBird list.

The milestone was logged at Prewitt Reservoir. For the record, Washington County species Nos. 200 and 201 were Snow Goose (25,000 of them, more or less) and Common Loon (just one of those).

Which you may ask, are the other 10 counties? Read on for their names and DFO species numbers on eBird:
Jefferson — 309; **Adams** — 273; **Douglas** — 252; **Arapahoe** — 250; **Pueblo** — 235; **Boulder** — 229; **El Paso** — 216; **Larimer** — 206; **Weld** — 202, and **Morgan** — 200.

Welcome to the 200 Club, Washington County!

Zooming into 2022: Spring programs on Australia, owls, migration, research

Bill Turner and Patrick O'Driscoll

The spring 2022 lineup of DFO's monthly programs is gelling nicely as we return to evening presentations on a wide variety of bird-related topics. After autumn 2021's first experiment with hybrid in-person/online programs, we will settle in from home this winter and early spring with all programs via the Zoom webinar app.

Look here in the coming months for Zoom registration information and links to upcoming programs, as well as for any updates and changes.

Gouldian Finch
Luke Paterson
NT Bird Specialists

Luke Paterson
The West Australian

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Birding Adventures in Australia's Northern Territory

Luke Paterson
Monday, January 17, 2022
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

EDITOR'S NOTE: A logistics note for this month only — Because of a scheduling conflict, this January program is NOT on the fourth Monday of the month, as all DFO evening program normally are, but on the THIRD Monday. Again, this month only.

First up in the 2022 monthly program series is Australian birding guide **Luke "Hawk Eyes" Paterson**, who will take us on a virtual tour of the best birding sites in the tropical Top End region of Australia's vast, diverse and sparsely populated Northern Territory.

A 21-year veteran guide on birding and photography tours in the Northern Territory, Paterson will explore the Top End's biodiverse range of habitats. The "NT" is home to more than 400 bird species, including Gouldian Finch, Red Goshawk, Rainbow Pitta, White-throated Grasswren, and the Great Bowerbird, whose unique, altar-like courtship structure Paterson visits in this brief YouTube clip.

A former assistant warden at BirdLife Australia's Broome Bird Observatory, Paterson is a winner of the prestigious Brolga Award, given in recognition of his excellence as a tour operator. He will join us from Darwin, capital of Northern Territory, via Zoom for the Jan. 17 program. Registration is required. Go to this link to sign up: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ja28H2XESt6V0_J8-FMw2g

Paul Bannick

Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls

Paul Bannick
Monday, February 28, 2022
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

Join award-winning author and wildlife photographer **Paul Bannick** for a program built on his best-selling book of the same name, *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*.

Paul is both the author and photographer of two best-selling bird books, *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls* (Braided River 2016) and *The Owl and The Woodpecker, Encounters with North America's Most Iconic Birds* (Mountaineers 2008). Both of Paul's books were well received. Washington's State Museum, The Burke, created two traveling exhibits based on his first

Continued on page 8

book, *The Owl and the Woodpecker*. His second book received a gold medal in the 2017 Independent Publisher Book Awards' "Animals/Pets" category. Paul's photography won awards from several prestigious photography contests, including those hosted by *Audubon* magazine and the International Conservation Photography Awards.

Bannick followed all 19 owl species in the US and Canada for his book. His presentation includes photos and video of owls in all four seasons on their territories, from courtship, mating and nesting in spring to fledging and feeding young in summer, and then dispersal in autumn and migrations and competition for food in winter. His book pays special attention to four species: Northern Pygmy-Owl, Great Gray Owl, Burrowing Owl and Snowy Owl.

Bannick's photography is found in birding guides from *Audubon*, *Peterson*, *The Smithsonian* and *Stokes* to the *National Wildlife Federation* and several volumes of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. His work has been widely published in variety of newspapers, magazines, books and publications in parks and refuges across North America and Europe. His photos also are part of several North American traveling exhibits.

Registration is required for this Zoom presentation. Look for the registration link and updates in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Scott Weidensaul
Chris DeSorbo

A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory birds

Scott Weidensaul
Monday, March 28, 2022
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

The program in March will be a particularly timely appetizer for the coming spring migration. Joining DFO for a Zoom program co-sponsored with the University of Colorado's Museum of Natural History will be writer-naturalist, bird migration researcher, lecturer and guide **Scott Weidensaul**, author of the best-selling book of the same name, *A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds*.

A World on the Wing introducers readers to scientists, researchers and bird lovers seeking to preserve global bird migration patterns facing disruption by climate change and other environmental challenges. Kirkus Reviews raved that *A World on the Wing* "belongs in every birder's library."

Another of Weidensaul's more than two dozen previous books, *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds* was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2000.

Weidensaul, a Pennsylvania native now living in the northern Appalachians of New Hampshire, is a fellow of the American Ornithological Society and an active field researcher. He co-directs Project Owlnet, a collaboration of 125 banding and research stations studying North American owl migration. For more than 25 years, he has also directed a major study of Northern Saw-Whet Owls.

Continued on page 9

Weidensaul is co-founder of Project SNOWstorm, which tracks Snowy Owls, and is a founder of Critical Connections, which charts migration of birds that breed in Alaskan national parks. He also co-founded the Northeast Motus Collaboration, a network to track bats, insects and small birds via automated telemetry receivers across the mid-Atlantic and New England.

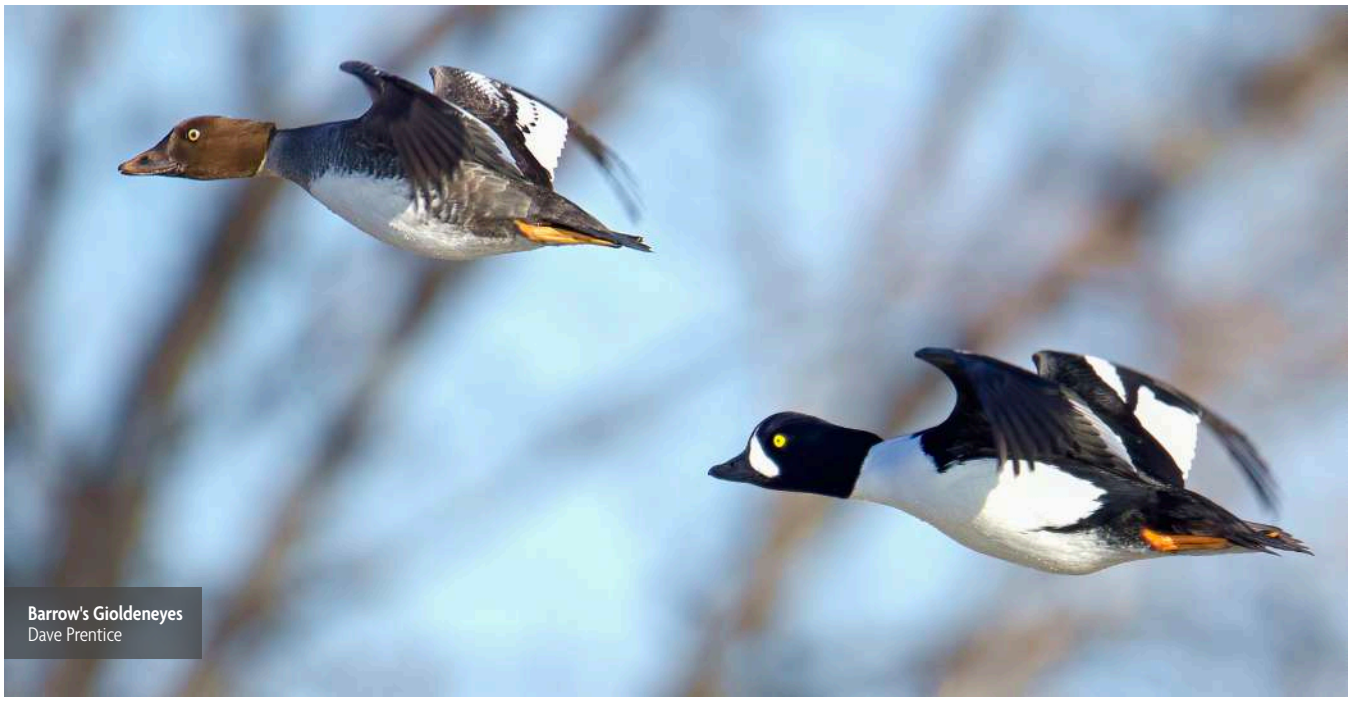
Registration for this Zoom presentation is required. Look for the registration link and more details on Weidensaul's program in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Research, Education, and Conservation Grantees Report to DFO

Multiple presenters
Monday, April 25, 2022
7 p.m. MDT

DFO's April program meeting will be a combination of presentations by researchers who received grants in 2021 from DFO's Research, Education and Conservation Grant Fund. Giving a presentation, leading a field trip, or writing a progress report for DFO's newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, are options that grant recipients may use to report to the membership about their research and how they used their grant funds.

Look for more details about this evening of scientific insight in an upcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



Barrow's Gioldeneyes
Dave Prentice

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Come count with us on Dec. 18: Yule love it!

Patrick O'Driscoll

If you're reading this in early to mid-December, the 67th Denver Christmas Bird Count is only a week or so away. Are you signed up yet? There's still time. What are you waiting for? Here's your invitation. Regrets only! Sign up now!

This annual winter tally inside a 15-mile circle of Denver's west and southwest suburbs was started by the National Audubon Society and still operates under its auspices. But it also has DFO's fingerprints — and eyes, binoculars, scopes and cameras — all over it.

The count leader and compiler himself is longtime DFO member and field trip leader **Joey Kellner**. Dozens of DFO members also volunteer annually for this mid-December canvass of species and numbers in a critical corner of the Front Range, from flats and valleys into the foothills.

And since 2019, Denver Field Ornithologists has helped by lending its easy-as-pie online field trip registration system to the cause. So all you have to do is go to the DFO website and sign up for one of 24 count zones, just like you would a regular DFO field trip.

Could it be any easier? As Kellner notes: "Fees? None! So, no excuses! Come have a great time and help count birds. Beginners and experts are all welcome!"

The "count circle" is subdivided into 24 areas. Each has an area leader as well as a DFO trip leader (a required technicality because, with the reservation system, the count is operating as if each is a DFO field trip). Not your ordinary field trip, of course. Participants canvass hotspots and birdy places within their area with one goal in mind: Count every species, and every individual of that species.

To participate, go to the DFO website's Field Trip registration page (https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx), choose a trip, and register! You can also contact the area leader (see chart below). If you're not choosy and would like to help in an area that needs more observers, contact Kellner himself (contact information below).

At day's end, all participants are invited in from the field to the compilation meeting where preliminary count results are shared. "Warm up, chat with other birders, and find out how the count fared," Kellner says. "It is a lot of fun." The gathering is set for approximately 5 p.m. in the multipurpose room at Chatfield State Park headquarters (south side of the lake near the Heronry Overlook). *Note: State park vehicle entry pass required. Carpool if possible!*

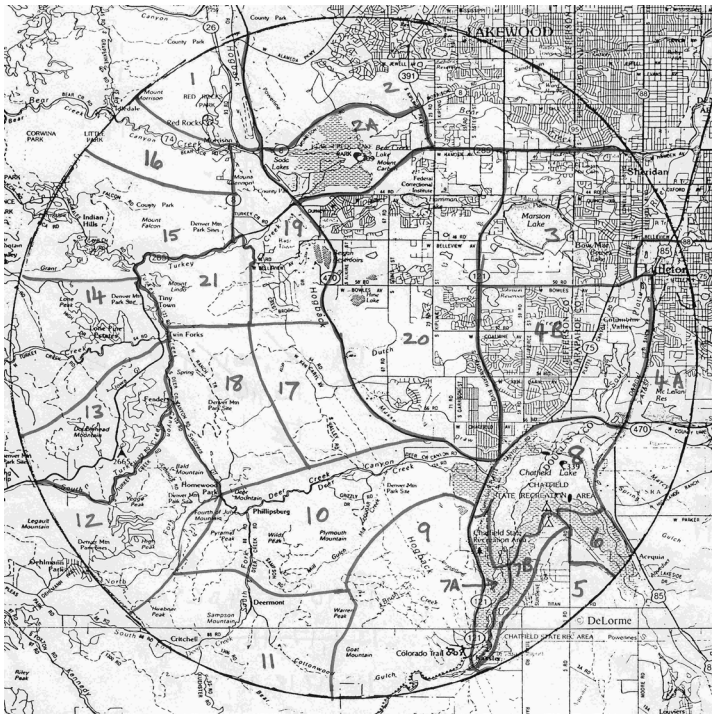
One more note if you attend the compilation meeting. Because of the Covid-19 surge, Colorado Parks & Wildlife requires that everyone wear a mask at indoor meetings in its facilities. "We are all used to that," Kellner adds, "so it shouldn't be much of an issue." Unfortunately, the restrictions did force Kellner to cancel the after-count potluck dinner. But stay tuned for next year's!

Continued on page 11

67th Denver Christmas Bird Count, Saturday, Dec. 18, 2021

Count Leader/Compiler: Joey Kellner, 303-978-1748 or SWDenverBirding.@gmail.com

AREA NUMBER & LOCATION		AREA LEADER	CONTACT INFO	DFO LEADER
1.	Red Rocks Park	Dan Stringer	720-854-5911	Mary Cay Burger
2.	Lower Bear Creek	Scott Somershoe	615-829-3573	David Suddjian
2A.	Bear Creek Lake Park	Mary Geder	303-981-8823	Mary Geder
3.	Bow Mar/Marston	Mark Amershek	720-243-1521	Mark Amershek
4A.	Lower South Platte (East)	Ed Holub	303-979-2194	Jill Boice
4B.	Lower South Platte (West)	Glenn Walbek	720-560-3671	David Suddjian
5.	Highline Ditch	Nancy Crews	303-842-2833	Doris Cruze
6.	Plum Creek	Norm Erthal	303-917-2596	Gregg Goodrich
7A.	Middle South Platte (West)	Sue Summers	253-678-3721	Sue Summers
7B.	Middle South Platte (East)	Frank Coons	970-640-9902	Bea Weaver
8.	Chatfield State Park	Joey Kellner	303-978-1748	Joey Kellner
9.	Upper South Platte *	Jill Holden	720-288-4018	Mary Keithler
10.	Lower Deer Creek (Chatfield Farms)	Michael Lester	201-306-8221	Diane Roberts
11.	Upper Deer Creek	Paul Slingsby	720-347-5169	Paul Slingsby
12.	Yegge Peak	Cynthia Madsen	303-770-6534	Cynthia Madsen
13.	Doublehead Mountain	Amy Davis	303-549-7759	Karen Strong
14.	North Turkey Creek	Ed Furlong	303-956-8321	Susan Blansett
15.	Indian Hills	Dick Prickett	303-674-0217	Gregg Goodrich
16.	Upper Bear Creek	Laura Steadman	843-319-5086	Laura Steadman
17.	Ken Caryl Ranch	Leader Needed	----------	David Suddjian
18.	Garrison Gate	Patrick O 'Driscoll	303-885-6955	Patrick O 'Driscoll
19.	Morrison/Willowbrook	Chris Gilbert	804-214-1508	Chris Gilbert
20.	Willow Creek	David Suddjian	dsuddjian@gmail.com	David Suddjian
21.	Mount Lindo/Willow Springs	Chris Sherry	303-807-3645	Patrick O 'Driscoll



Mark Amershek

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:
Up close with field trip leader Mark Amershek

Editor's note: ***In the Scope*** *is a series of occasional Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, and other volunteers and members who participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email* The Lark Bunting *at* patodrisk@gmail.com

Name: Mark Amershek
Home city: Denver
Age: 73
Occupation: Oil & gas finance (retired)

How and when I became a birder?

In 2009, I was going with some friends on vacation to Costa Rica. About six weeks before our departure, the tour company called to say they were changing the trip from basically a tourist trip to one specifically set up for birdwatching. At that point, I had never birdwatched in my life. But I told them yeah, I'll still go. So I went to Mike's Camera and bought a $200 pair of Nikon binoculars and away I went. I learned that you can't really go to Costa Rica and not fall in love with birds, and from that point on, I was in love. I'm a kid from eastern Kansas. I had never seen anything like the birds I saw in Costa Rica. That fall, I took the Denver Audubon beginning birding class with **Hugh and Urling Kingery** and from then on, it was just birds, birds, and more birds.

When and why I joined DFO?

I was taking trips with Denver Audubon in 2010 or early 2011, great trips, probably once or twice a month. And then someone, I can't remember who, told me, "Well, if you want to go on more trips, you should contact Denver Field Ornithologists." DFO had more trips going almost every weekend, and with good birders, too. From that point on, I also started going to the evening program meetings.

First DFO trip I went on?

I can't really recall now, but it was probably one of **Paul Slingsby**'s trips. I really liked his outings. Paul used to go all over the place. It could have been Chico Basin, or Pueblo, or maybe up north on the Pawnee Grasslands. That was so many trips ago!

First field trip I led?

I knew **Christie Owens**, who lives up in Longmont and used to run several DFO trips. I'd birded together with her on some of those. In August of 2013, she was running a trip to Rocky Mountain National Park. Something came up very urgently, and she asked, "Would you mind taking over running this trip for me? You know how to handle it, don't you?" I said, "Well, yeah, I think so." Back then, leading field trips was kind of informal. There was definitely no learning curve. If you wanted to lead a trip you just basically created a trip somewhere. By then, I had basically had about four years of birding, but it had got very intense for me very quickly. I learned quickly.

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Favorite trip destination and why?

88th and Platte. 88th Avenue and the South Platte River is year-round multi-birding. I have never struck out — there is always something there to see, no matter what season or day of the week. It was where I first ran into a Barrow's Goldeneye. That remains the highlight of a trip to 88th and the South Platte. I lead that trip at least three, four, maybe five times a year. Whether you're walking north or south, downstream or up, it makes no difference. It's just a great place to see birds.

Best DFO trip ever?

John Breitsch's August 2019 trip to southwestern New Mexico. Fantastic, well designed, well researched, best ever that I've been on simply because of that. John knows what he's doing. He's a great trip leader and a funny guy. The nice thing about the trip, you're in some mountainous areas with great birds in some of those canyons, but when you go just a little bit south, almost to the Mexican border, you get some great out-in-the-desert type environment. And going down, we birded alongside the Rio Grande.

Field trip philosophy?

I have my own style. You could call it the Amershek Method. Way back when, I thought I was going to be a schoolteacher. And so basically, to me, every experience I have is a learning experience. That's my methodology in leading field trips. You have to learn something — but it has to be done in such a way that you'll enjoy yourself. This is not sitting somewhere and listening to a lecture, which I have seen on so many birding trips, where the leader is a lecturer rather than a teacher. And that's unfortunate.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

I would give my soul to bird in Venezuela. Almost 1,400 species recorded there! But no one goes now, not even the Brits. None of the tour companies I know in the US go to Venezuela; it's too unstable politically. Rockjumper, an international birding tour company, ran a four-week tour there that I signed up for — and then it was canceled. I've been to Cuba, though. I snuck in through Cancún, Mexico. Long story. As we taxied down the runway, the Cubana Airlines flight started smoking. This was an old, old Russian jet. Back at the terminal, we had to wait overnight for a replacement part. But the next morning, somehow they had leased a jet with no name on it or anything, just a big 727 for hire that got us to Cuba. Man, the birding was good, because we had the **Kirkconnells**, **Arturo Sr.** and **Arturo Jr**. Arturo Sr. wrote the book *Birds of Cuba*, so we had the best there was. We saw 25 of the 26 species endemic only to Cuba. If you ever have the chance, go. GO!

The next trip I'm leading?

Technically, I'm leading the Bow Mar/Marston section of the Denver Christmas Bird Count on Dec. 18, but that's a DFO trip just for sign-up purposes. My real next DFO field trip will be a month later at . . . you guessed it! My favorite DFO destination, 88th and the South Platte, on Jan. 18, 2022.

Your most memorable birding trip?

Birding in Honduras for a most of a week in December 2018 — while stranded during *presidential election riots*! I had booked a week-long American Birding Association trip, and I flew in the day before to San Pedro Sula, in the northwest corner of the country. I scheduled a taxi back to the airport to meet the rest of the tour group when they came in on Friday. After breakfast, I asked the woman at the hotel desk where my cab was, and she said, "No, no taxi" and pointed up at a TV in the lobby. On the screen, people were rioting in the streets! The whole country was at a standstill. People cut down trees, dragged them onto bridges, piled up old tires and set everything afire.

Continued on page 14

Amershek, kneeling, on a DFO field trip

IN THE SCOPE *cont from page 13*

About 5 p.m. I got a call from **Liz Gordon** of ABA, also stranded but at the airport: "We can't get to you, Mark, but we're working on it." But after two more calls from Liz Friday night and early Saturday, the 40 other people on the tour were on a 40-minute flight to Guatemala City to salvage the trip. Liz said they were still working to get me out. Later, she called again: A Honduran guide was going to try to reach me!

On Sunday morning, **Alejandro**, one of the best guides in Honduras, arrived in a tiny red something-or-other station wagon. After determining that no US airlines were flying in or out, he said, "You can stay in this hotel for the next 4-5 days, or if you want, you can come with me." He was driving north to a birding lodge where two American tourists from Virginia had gone before the rioting started. In fact, that was where the ABA tour was supposed to start. "Most certainly!" I replied.

On the way, we passed burned-out convenience stores and bridges, but we made it up to the lodge . . . and went birding! I even got a couple of lifers that day. Over dinner, Alejandro said he'd try to get us over to Pico Bonito, the lodge for birders in Honduras, farther east near the Caribbean coast. Early Monday, the four of us piled into the car and took off. But about halfway to Pico Bonito, the traffic came to a standstill. Alejandro got out to talk to some guys by the roadside. "They're burning bridges up ahead of us with trees and tires," he reported. "Now they're adding more tires to the fires." So we U-turned back toward the last village we had come through. "It's getting towards lunch, and I know a hotel with a nice restaurant there," Alejandro said. "We'll go out on the deck, have lunch and try to figure out what we can do."

Ohhhkie-dokie, I wondered to myself.

So we were having lunch, beautiful view of the sea, and Alejandro was on the phone, trying to arrange a flight on a private plane. I looked out and said, "Isn't that the Caribbean out there?" I looked down the beach. "Aren't those fishing boats down there?" Alejandro popped up. "I'll be right back," he said, running down the beach to talk to a couple of fishermen. Next thing you know, we and our luggage are in a fishing boat, motoring about 40 miles up the coast, where there's a van meeting us from Pico Bonito! *On the beach*! I spent the rest of the week birding at the lodge: 3,000 acres, gated property nestled between two rivers, great habitat, amazing birds. The Lovely Cotinga was the highlight bird.

The best thing? The guy who ran the lodge, **James Adams**, had a contact at the airport in the town closest to Pico Bonito. By Saturday, he had gotten me onto a plane back to San Pedro, and from there back to the US.

FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

DFO trips: Signing up for memorable moments

Editor's note: ***From the Field with David Suddjian*** *is an occasional column on topics of birding note by DFO's Field Trip chair. Your feedback and ideas are welcome. Contact David at dsuddjian@gmail.com.*

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trips chair

Every DFO field trip has memorable moments. It is remarkable, but every time we go out there is something for every participant — a special moment of encounter with a bird, or a new place, or even just having a great time with other birders on the trip.

As I write this on Nov. 29, it's just hours since I led a trip to a few lakes and ponds in the Littleton area, and we worked in a visit to the Denver Botanic Gardens Chatfield Farms to see a male Mexican Duck first seen a few days before. This handsome bird was a life-list addition for everyone on the trip, me included. It was also DFO's 398th Colorado species for the club's state list on eBird. That's a memorable moment!

This trip also happened to introduce DFO's Developing Birder theme, and I had chosen to focus on waterfowl. The trip was similar to any other DFO trip in many regards. We had some birders who frequently go on DFO field trips, and some others who rarely do. Most of the participants were relatively new to birding (one or two years at it); some others had been birding longer.

The response was encouraging for trips with this new emphasis. It filled up quickly once it opened for registration — and it continued to have a waiting list of 4-6 people until the last week before the trip. As some participants shifted around, those who stuck it out on the waitlist moved up and onto the trip roster. In the end, we even had an open spot that wasn't filled.

That's a take-home message: If you want to get on a DFO trip, you nearly always can, if you wait on the waitlist. This is just a common pattern. Many trips fill up quickly, but in the end, there are almost always openings if you're patient.

Concerns have been expressed from time to time that a limited number of members sign up for an inordinate number of spots on many trips as soon as DFO posts the new ones on the first of the month. Actually, I see this as a success. I've learned that these "frequent fliers" are seriously engaged in our outings, and they are taking advantage of great learning opportunities to build their birding skills and experience. Over the months and years, these regulars change, as new and developing birders find DFO on their journey.

I have also heard concern at times about high rates of cancellation, suggesting that registration starts too far in advance, or that some birders need to be more discerning about their schedules before signing up. Yes, there is often considerable turnover of registered participants, but this is a freedom that DFO's registration process allows and makes work. There are many valid reasons why people have to cancel. Usually, it's not negligence. Again, the waitlist means people who want to go on the trip almost always get to after all.

DFO is taking two new steps in our field trip registration process that we think will help. First, beginning on Dec. 1, we moved the time when DFO's new slate of trips is posted and available for online registration to 12 noon, not the pre-dawn hours. This allows those unable to leap on it before sunrise a chance to sign up for popular trips before they fill up. In other words, it levels the playing field regarding registration.

The second change will be to move the opening date of registration for most of our trips to 2-4 weeks ahead of the trip date, instead of the current 4-8 weeks. We plan to start this after New Year's.

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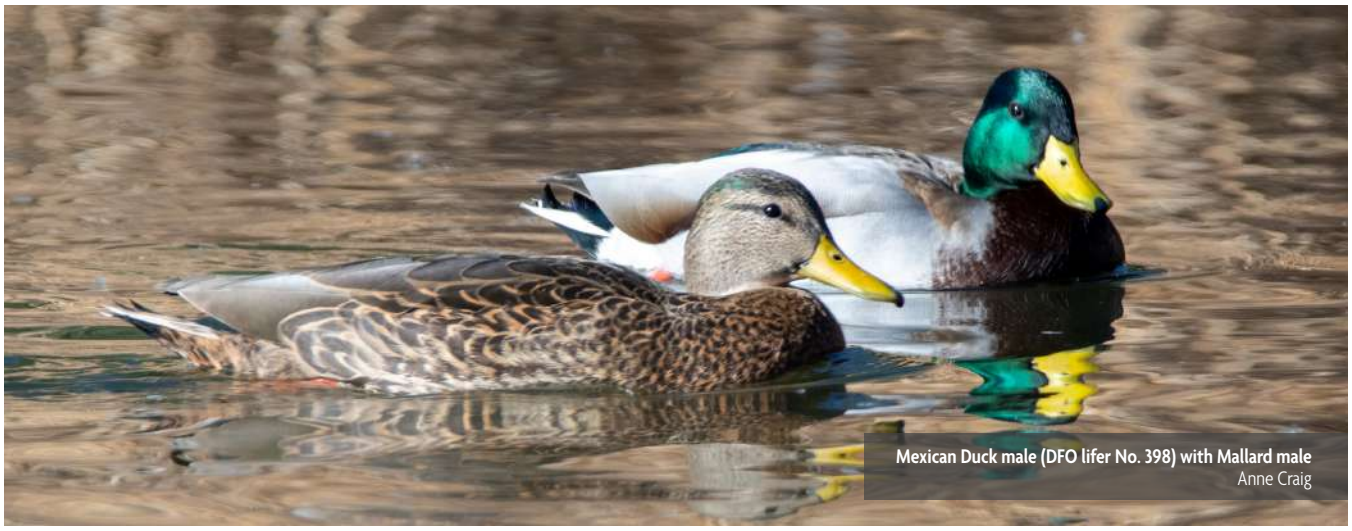

Mexican Duck male (DFO lifer No. 398) with Mallard male
Anne Craig

FROM THE FIELD *cont from page 15*

Here's how it will work: Trips scheduled for Feb. 1-15 will "go live" for registration on Jan. 15, 2022, instead of on New Year's Day. The other half of new trips, scheduled for Feb. 16-28, will be available for sign up on Feb. 1. Again, signup time will be 12 noon instead of sometime before dawn.

If a DFO trip requires a longer lead time — such as an extended-day, overnight or multiday road trip with logistical considerations — we can accommodate that, too. Meanwhile, the shortened registration timeframe for all other trips may allow field trip leaders to lead more outings, with flexibility to commit closer to the trip date.

The new year brings the promise of lots of great birds to look forward to on DFO field trips. Come join us! Be a part of what DFO is doing in the field by registering for our trips. You will be signing up for memorable moments.

Welcome to new DFO members

Caroline Armstrong, Parker; Kent Bagley, Littleton; Doug Bridwell, Littleton; Tom Casadevall, Lakewood; Carol Cwiklinski, Lakewood; Meredith Denton-Hedrick, Elizabeth; Dwayne Dickerson, Denver; Leslie Dixon, Highlands Ranch; Julie Grundmeier, Highlands Ranch; Glenn Hageman, Denver; Billy A. Harris Jr. and Linda Purcell, Denver; Linda Hodges, Colorado Springs; Debbie and Steve Kennedy, Aurora; Catherine Long, Erie; Paul Malinowski, Littleton; Emily K. Marchant, Denver; Mary and Charles "Chuck" Metzger, Centennial; Ginger Okada, Westminster; Nancy Oken, Lakewood; Barbara Retzlaff, Boulder; Valentina Roumi, Boulder; Kathryn Smith, Denver; Martha Strickland, Denver, and Sally Swartz and Rob Roy, Greenwood Village

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Ann Bonnell (mother) and Mary Ann Bonnell; Doris Cruze; Jean and Charlie Curlee; Jim Esten; David Hill; Marjorie Jannotta and Chuck Hundertmark; Judy Lane; Jim Petri and Christie Owens "In memory of Richard Mendez"; Barbara Retzlaff; Bob Righter; Denise and Danny Smith; Mary Ann Tavery; Elaine Wagner; Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele; Michael Wilson and Barbara Nabors, and Scott Yanco

Friends of DFO
Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Jean and Charlie Curlee; Julia Gwinn; Billy A. Harris Jr. and Linda Purcell; David Hill; Marjorie Jannotta and Chuck Hundertmark; Jim Petri and Christie Owens; Bob Righter; Valentina Roumi, and Cheryl Siefert

PROGRAM REVIEW

Fishers Peak: Colorado's new backcountry sanctuary for people . . . and birds!

Patrick O'Driscoll

The manager of Colorado's new Fishers Peak State Park, **Crystal Dreiling**, was cautious as she introduced herself to an audience of more than 90 birders at the Denver Field Ornithologists program Nov. 22 via Zoom. "I am absolutely *not* a bird expert," Dreiling warned as she began her presentation, "From 'Crazy French' to Fishers Peak: A New Colorado State Park."

But then she shared survey data about the park's birdlife and offered encouraging words about Fishers Peak's potential for supporting avian inhabitants and the binoculars-carrying visitors who will come looking for them.

For starters, inventories of breeding species on the 19,200-acre site are ongoing. Dreiling said park staff, individual Colorado birders, and a paid contractor who visits "year after year" to survey the park's breeding birds have found diversity. So far, they've recorded five species each of woodpecker and owl, eight warbler species, three kinds of vireo, Ovenbirds and "a number of other species that are breeding on the property or in the area."

That includes an active Peregrine Falcon nest on the park's namesake mountain. Dreiling said its presence will mean an annual "hard closure" around the nest from March 15 to July 31: "We don't intend to let anybody within half a mile buffer around it. We're planning the trails that way so that when (hikers) get to that closure" point on the future trail to the summit, "they can loop back on other (trail) opportunities." She added that additional seasonal closures may be added "as we learn about successful raptor nesting out there."

View the complete video of **"From 'Crazy French' to Fishers Peak: A New Colorado State Park"** in the Past Programs archive on the DFO website: https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx

"Out there" aptly describes the park and its future. Fishers Peak is just a couple of miles south of Trinidad and borders the first 10 miles of Interstate 25 in Colorado north from the New Mexico state line. But park planners are developing "a very rugged, backcountry experience" for visitors, Dreiling said, not a "front-country" playground for fishing, full-hookup camping, boating and other such recreational pursuits. She said people already get those and more at nearby Trinidad Lake SP, which she has also managed for the past 8 years.

"From the beginning, I asked the planners that we not re-create anything that's going on at Trinidad Lake," Dreiling said. Those planners are scheduled to deliver the park's master plan early in 2022, and construction of about 20 miles of trails is set to begin in the spring.

Habitat sensitivity maps and studies for the master plan suggest most of the southern half of the park will fall under "most-protected property" status, with little to no development beyond trail construction and the maintenance of a few roads for park upkeep, emergency access and wildfire response. This will allow the park to "balance recreation opportunities and conservation," Dreiling added.

That's in keeping with the landscape. Much of the property "comes to us with lots of contours," Dreiling said. The western half is corrugated with slopes and pinyon-juniper woodlands rising to Ponderosa pine and mixed-conifer forest. On the east side, high-elevation mesas and grasslands trail down and away to the Great Plains. The property was, after all, a longtime ranch, known locally as Crazy French.

Although the site has few streams and no lakes, "we've got a lot of springs and seeps on the property, so there's surprisingly a lot of water in the higher elevations," Dreiling said. Not to mention "the opportunity for great views wherever you go," from slickrock and sandstone boulder fields to high meadows and a large mesa at the park's southern boundary that nearly borders New Mexico's Sugarite Canyon State Park.

The property was purchased for $24 million in 2019 with the help of The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Lands, Great Outdoors Colorado and the City of Trinidad. Colorado Parks and Wildlife formally took possession in April 2020, Dreiling's bosses, eager to get "boots on the ground" of Colorado's

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PROGRAM REVIEW *cont from page 17*

new treasure, pushed her to open some part of it within two months, an impossibility as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold. But Dreiling and her team were able to get a postage stamp-sized portion of the park open by the end of October 2020: 250 acres and less than 2 miles of trail.

Next spring, the park will start building about 20 miles of new trails, including a route up Fishers Peak, a flat-topped rampart with commanding views of surrounding Las Animas County and beyond. Expected to open in another 2 years or so, that trail will be no mere walk in the park — 8 miles each way, with a 3,000-foot elevation gain to the 9,366-foot summit.

Eventually, hikers, mountain bikers and horse riders will coexist on a network of trails, some designated for one or another use. "More mountain biking trails, more trails in general, wildlife watching opportunities," Dreiling said. Master planners also must unravel the property's more than 90 miles of interior ranch roads to determine which few will remain for park management use while the rest "go back to nature." A modest campground and backcountry camping are also on the drawing board.

Meanwhile, mapping of park resources (vegetation, wildlife, cultural resources, reptiles, butterflies and moths, etc.) goes on. Field biologists are surveying habitat where the endangered New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse has been found.

Given its current tiny public-use footprint, the park has not drawn many birders yet. Twenty-nine birding checklists have been filed from the "Fishers Peak SP/Moore's Canyon" eBird hotspot so far (including several by individual DFO members), with 70 species recorded. With our own planning and imagination, can the first DFO field trip to the park be far behind?

Planner getting community feedback on visit to Fishers Peak State Park
Colorado Parks & Wildlife

COLORADO BIRDING HISTORY

Emails from Frank: Labor of love is adding long-passed birder's checklists to eBird

Patrick O'Driscoll

In the distant mists of mid-20th century Colorado birding lore, **Frank Justice** was one of those guys who keep records. His were meticulous and voluminous: the handwritten checklists of field trips, seasonal counts, breeding bird surveys, bird banding, and personal outings of a prominent longtime birder.

After Justice's death in 1988, his widow and fellow DFO member **Jan Justice** held onto Frank's decades-long trove, which filled filing cabinets, card catalogues, bound ledgers, bookshelves, boxes and a closet. The files are destined one day for the archives of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. But thanks to an offhand interaction with her stepdaughter recently, Jan — now **Jan Justice-Waddington**, age 95 and a past president of Denver Field Ornithologists — is giving bird researchers earlier access to the data . . . and giving her extended family new glimpses of Jan's own fond memories of birding with Frank.

It began when stepdaughter **Mary Kay Waddington**, Jan's close friend and an avid birder herself, was visiting her hilltop home high above Coal Creek Canyon between Boulder and Golden. Jan had married Mary Kay's father, **Dave Waddington**, a couple of years after Frank's passing. They designed and built their solar-powered aerie in the early 1990s. (Dave, a pioneer solar engineer and 75-year member of the Colorado Mountain Club, died in 2017 at age 92.) The house had more than enough room for the accumulated birding files of Frank Justice, who had become fast friends with both Jan and Dave when the three were outdoors-loving students at the University of Colorado in the 1940s.

"We were in her closet for some reason," said Mary Kay, "and Jan said, 'Oh, look, those are Frank's bird records'" — boxes of bound ledgers, sheafs of marked-up mimeographed checklists, file folders, binders, books, letters and other loose papers, dating from the 1940s through 1970s. Mary Kay's interest was piqued. "I said to Jan, 'You really ought to enter these into eBird.' And she said, 'Oh yeah, right. Well, if I had the time.' So I said, 'How about you let *me* do it?'"

Adding old checklists to eBird isn't new. Countless thousands of birders have been transferring pre-eBird paper tallies into the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's global database ever since it was invented in 2002. One of Frank and Jan's contemporaries, renowned Colorado birder and DFO member **Hugh Kingery**, resurrected his own innumerable paper checklists, including many from his daily walks to and from high school through Denver City Park from 1947 through 1950. Once added to the eBird database, Hugh's observations recorded the first 80 species on the park's eBird list.

But Frank Justice died more than a decade before eBird was born — even before email. So none of his observations had gone digital. And Jan, retired from teaching fourth grade in Denver Public Schools but still active in birding, conservation and environmental endeavors, hadn't the time to transcribe decades of checklists into eBird. She still kept them close, having shared so many birding moments with him: "I couldn't throw *those* away. They were a part of my life, like a diary,"

Mary Kay's generous offer meant Frank's 20th-century observations would now begin to enhance Colorado's avian historical record in the next century and beyond. But neither she nor Jan expected a bonus outcome that Mary Kay calls "family history through bird lists."

The first time Mary Kay "shared" one of Frank's newly eBirded checklists with her stepmother, Jan was shocked that it arrived as an email from "Frank Justice." That's because eBird labels and delivers list-sharing notifications in the name of the checklist's original observer — even one who died more than three decades earlier, before email or eBird membership.

Now, whenever one of those checklist emails "from" Frank lands in Jan's inbox, "it brings up memories," she said. And how: A recent one took Jan back to when she and Frank, newlyweds on the Colorado Plains in the late 1940s and early 1950s, were delving deeply and daily into birding as a flatland alternative to hiking and climbing in the mountains above Boulder.

"Reading (that checklist) just brought back the whole setting," Jan began. "I see the lake. I see the road. I see the house we

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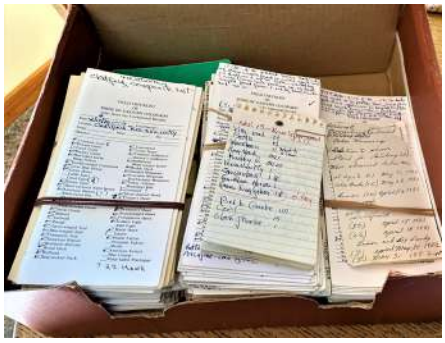

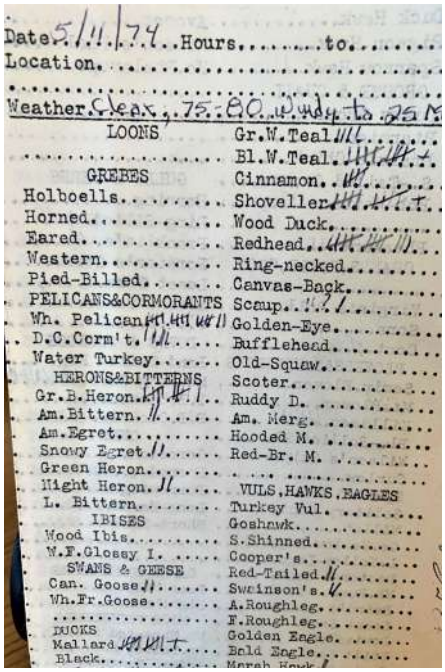

PHOTOS TOP TO BOTTOM:
A boxful of Frank Justice's bird checklists
Frank Justice in the field
Frank's 47-year-old spring checklist from Prewitt Reservoir

EMAILS FROM FRANK *cont from page 19*

were in at the time, a little farmhouse 3 miles west of Brush. We would go down from the house to see what birds were at Dodd Bridge, over the South Platte." That crossing today is Jean K. Tool State Wildlife Area, a small but notable stop along Colorado's Interstate 76 birding corridor. "There was usually nothing special, but then some bird would show up that we hadn't seen before," Jan continued. "There was always that suspense, that we would see something new."

In an email conversation about old checklists last September with other birders on Colorado Field Ornithologists' CoBirds listserv, Mary Kay described her eBirdizing of Frank's checklists as "a lovely way of sharing (Jan's) history — she receives a shared list and tells me wonderful stories about where they were and the kinds of things happening (then) as the lists remind her of them. Who knew that bird lists could provide a way of relating and sharing family history!"

Frank Justice recorded his first checklist in a bound ledger more than 73 years ago. Dated April 10, 1948, it is a street-by-street record of a birding walk he took from 17th Street in Boulder to the Hale Building on the University of Colorado campus, where he and Jan first met as students.

"He was so meticulous about these," Mary Kay said of the oversized, bound volumes that reach from the late '40s into the 1950s and beyond. Opening one on the table beside her, Jan read aloud a Feb. 15, 1953 entry describing a survey visit to a Black-billed Magpie nest: "12 feet above ground, 2 eggs incubating." Given the tangled and impenetrable-ball-of-sticks construction of a magpie nest, their interviewer felt compelled to ask: How could Frank know there were eggs in there? "You climb the tree, you reach in," Jan replied. "What else can you do?"

So many species names have changed in the decades since then that even an accomplished birder like Mary Kay has to hunt for the modern names of species whose old names would stump many birders. One of Frank's mimeographed checklists included Pigeon Hawk (today's Merlin), Holboells Grebe (Red-necked), Water Turkey (Anhinga), Oldsquaw (Long-tailed Duck), and Marsh Hawk (Northern Harrier), among others.

Trickier than updating species names is matching historical location descriptions to the nearest eBird hotspot or the approximate geocoordinates of the place. "You've got to put a point in (eBird) for the exact location. That's probably the most time-consuming part," Mary Kay said. "The checklists start in the '40s and I'm only up to 1952 so far." Frank Justice kept such detailed notes, she usually can get close to the likely spot with online research and maps.

Mary Kay did not become Jan's stepdaughter, of course, until a couple of years after Frank's death. But she had known him since childhood. The Justices and Waddingtons had interacted across two generations, from college pals to young marrieds with kids to ripe old age, in numerous pursuits, outdoors and in. "Mary Kay calls us clones," said Jan.

Continued on page 21

EMAILS FROM FRANK *cont from page 20*

A Boulder native, Jan met both future husbands at CU during World War II. She and Dave, a native of Westcliffe, were avid hikers and platonic friends. Frank, from Greenfield, MA, had hiked and written about the Appalachian Trail as a teen. All three joined the University of Colorado Hiking Club, trekking Front Range trails and climbing 14'ers. Both Frank and Dave were Navy men. After the war, Jan and Frank married in 1946 and had their first of four sons while still in school.

Their last semester at CU, "we decided we wanted to take a class together, and we took Dr. Alexander's ornithology class," Jan said, referring to distinguished CU biologist and ornithologist **Gordon Alexander** (1901-1973). "We were not really birders at that time, not much beyond robins. But when he took the class out east of Boulder to wonderful habitat with a big heronry, we were just fascinated."

After graduation, they moved to northeastern Colorado for Frank's first job as a public health officer. He inspected restaurants and school cafeterias in a six-county region that included Sterling and Fort Morgan. Eventually he rose to run the department.

It was the right place and time to take up birding. Birders had barely glassed that part of the state. Soon, Frank and Jan were trapping and banding birds (even right in their State Street yard when they lived in Sterling), and they did some of the first breeding bird surveys on the Colorado Plains. "We had to bird because we couldn't climb," Jan said. They missed the mountains, and when an opportunity opened at the Denver Department of Health & Hospitals, the Justice family moved back to the Front Range for good in 1956.

Now that they were among other birders, "we joined DFO and CFO just after they became separate clubs," said Jan. She led field trips, mostly to her favorite destination, Chatfield Reservoir (before it became a state park). In 1981, she became president of DFO while Frank was serving on the board of CFO.

Since college, they had remained in touch with Dave Waddington, who with his wife, **May**, had daughters Mary Kay and **Susan**. Both couples liked to square-dance, too. It was after the Justice boys met the Waddington girls in the Junior Colorado Mountain Club that the two families fully reconnected. "My sister and I even dated two of the Justice boys," said Mary Kay — middle sons **Stan** and **Dean**.

Mary Kay eventually took up birding at Oberlin College, where her roommate was a birder. Back home in Colorado, she went birding occasionally with Frank and Jan. "Frank showed me my first Long-eared Owl, birding out at Chatfield. That's my fondest memory of him," said Mary Kay, who now has, and still uses, his spotting scope.

"Birding was Frank's escape," Jan said. "He needed it," with a high-pressure job as chief of the Denver health department's housing section. He was also a poet and writer, and he and Jan pursued wild mushrooms with the Colorado Mycological Society. A smoker like so many of his generation, Frank eventually succumbed to lung disease in 1988. (Hugh Kingery gave the eulogy at his funeral.)

"One year later, being a very proper English gentleman, Dave Waddington showed up," Jan continued. He asked her out on a date to an Audubon program at the Denver Museum of Natural History. Another year later, the old college friends married in 1990 at the Lookout Mountain Nature Center above Golden, and Jan became adult Mary Kay's stepmother . . . and a good friend.

Besides transcribing the Frank Justice records into eBird, Mary Kay Waddington is a private instructor in the harp and an author on the Suzuki Method in her instrument. She lives in the Englewood house where she grew up. Her stepmother volunteers from home for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, tallying sightings for a Coal Creek Canyon network that observes bears, mountain lions, moose, and of course, birds.

Although at 95 she is well dug in at home with its endless view from 8,360 feet, Jan Justice-Waddington said she still goes birding "every single day — to CoBirds!" There among the CFO email community, she enjoys when Colorado birders post notable sightings. "They're reminding me of birds I've seen," she added, "and many I have not."

Jan and Mary Kay Waddingon pore over Frank's birding ledgers
Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO GRANTS FUND

Small grants like DFO's increase fair access for students to do vital avian research

Editor's note: As most DFO members renew their memberships at year's end, we publish this essay by a previous recipient of our Research, Education, & Conservation Grant as a reminder. When you renew, consider a generous gift to help scientists, especially those in college, conduct research valuable to the welfare and our understanding of the birds we love.

Scott Yanco

Participation in scientific research as a college student plays an outsized role in the lives and future careers of aspiring scientists. Those who are able to conduct authentic research during their undergraduate years are more likely to persist in their fields and, thus, more likely to become scientists.

Academic research experience also can make a difference in getting into graduate school, publishing research findings, obtaining project funding and more. Doing research as an undergraduate at Colorado College was paramount in helping me envision myself as a scientist and build the skills to further my career.

Unfortunately, only a few students obtain these important research experiences. Even more problematically, those who identify as underrepresented minorities are disproportionately excluded from undergraduate research opportunities.

While many factors lead to the over-representation of wealthy white men in ornithological research, limited access to formative research experiences for underrepresented minorities is an important one. Many undergraduate research projects require students to volunteer their time. Such opportunities are limited to those who can afford to do unpaid work. This reality often excludes underrepresented minorities.

Although I am not a member of an underrepresented minority, I would have been unable to do undergraduate research without pay. Without access to even small amounts of money to make my engagement in scientific research possible, I might not be writing to you today as a scientist.

This is where Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Education, & Conservation Grants program offers a unique advantage. Unlike many other funding opportunities — including those from many national ornithological societies — DFO's program allows its funds to support undergraduate researchers. While working on my PhD at the University of Colorado Denver, funding for my dissertation's field and lab work came from small grant programs like DFO's.

It is hard to overstate the effect such funds can have, especially at a school like UCD, whose enrollment includes many first-generation, non-traditional, low-income, and underrepresented minority students. Many of them work off-campus jobs, which can make full-time volunteer work at a remote research study site unrealistic if not impossible.

DFO's funding allowed me to pay the undergraduate students who helped in my PhD research. This made a real and substantive difference in who gained authentic research experiences and *how many* of them I could support. The majority of those who participated in my research fit, in one way or another, the exact demographics historically excluded from science. These students assisted in the lab, in the field, and at the computer. They acquired key skills, from capturing Flammulated Owls in the San Juan Mountains to preparing feather samples for stable-isotope analysis in the laboratory. As I write this, many of them continue to pursue their career goal of becoming scientists.

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DFO GRANTS *cont from page 22*

Yanco with Flammulated Owl
Scott Yanco

This all starts with organizations like DFO making such funds available — which starts with the individual contributors who make the grants possible. The benefit to DFO's mission of understanding and conserving birds and their habitat is clear. But so are the broader benefits to society, including who has access to tools critical for becoming scientists and, therefore, what tomorrow's scientific community will look like.

I will always be grateful to DFO, both for its support of my research and for making it possible to include talented young scientists whose involvement might not have been possible otherwise. Thank you, and here's to a more inclusive future for ornithological research.

Scott Yanco, PhD, is a postdoctoral associate in the Center for Biodiversity and Global Change and the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Yale University. Yanco received grant funding from DFO for four years (2017-2020) for research on Flammulated Owls in Colorado.

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 58 | ISSUE 02 | FEBRUARY/MARCH 2022 DFOBIRDS.ORG

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

Rough-legged Hawk

Rob Raker

Green Mountain
Lakewood, CO

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dinosaur Ridge Hawkwatch 2022: Come join DFO's spring raptor extravaganza

Susan Blansett

See that? Feel that? Here we are, finally in something resembling actual winter in Colorado. As I write this on New Year's Eve, flakes are falling in metro Denver's first real snowfall of the season — an overdue occurrence that I think most of us would agree is more than welcome.

But coming on the heels of the tragic Marshall Fire in Boulder County — hundreds of homes lost and tens of thousands displaced in the evacuation and disruption of Superior and Louisville, CO — this snowfall is a bittersweet reminder. Climate change is now part of our everyday existence here and around the globe.

A number of DFO members live in the fire zone, and I desperately hope none of you have become victims of this extraordinary out-of-season fire. I trust that fellow DFO members will do our part, whether by volunteering or donating, to help those hit by loss.

Now: I want to devote the rest of this column to an important DFO community science project: the upcoming season of Hawkwatch at Dinosaur Ridge.

This annual count of migrating raptors begins March 1 and continues through May 7. Our effort is part of a major, nationwide event across North America each spring. Here and elsewhere, these vital observations provide important data about these magnificent birds that help us develop conservation plans. Observers share the excitement of first (and repeated) sightings of so many species and hone their identification skills for birds of prey in flight at the same time.

Hawkwatch's fellowship among birders who love raptors just adds to the fun. I myself will be on the ridge this spring; I wouldn't miss it for the world. Hawkwatch also unites Denver Field Ornithologists in fellowship with other birding and wildlife organizations. We so appreciate having **Colorado Field Ornithologists** as a partner in funding what will be our first paid Hawkwatch observer since DFO assumed responsibility for the count in 2019.

We are also grateful to **Jefferson County Open Space** and **Mary Ann Bonnell** for underwriting and placing new signs at Dinosaur Ridge, among other improvements. We are also collaborating with both CFO and **Denver Audubon** to promote Hawkwatch both as a volunteer opportunity and as a paid position. We'll be posting the position on social media and at area colleges and universities. If you are interested, check out the job description for this nine-week, full-time "Hawk Counter" position on the DFO Website's new Hawkwatch page at dfobirds.org/Birds/Hawkwatch.aspx. Or you also can scan the Hawkwatch QR code in the "DFO News Notes" column in this edition of the newsletter. (Thanks go to Hawkwatch coordinator **Dave Hill** and DFO web maven **Ann Johnson** for their assistance in creating our Hawkwatch page.)

I want to be clear: Having a paid hawk counter to support the daily effort does not fill the need for volunteer counters. It's a fact that more eyes on the sky mean more birds in the bins! Our contract hawk counter will enhance the experience for every Hawkwatch volunteer while helping to ensure full coverage on the ridge through the season. Not only do these volunteers spot and identify raptors — they also introduce hikers on Dinosaur Ridge to birding and the excitement of seeing raptors in flight up close.

So here's my challenge to all you current or fledgling raptor-lovers: Mark your calendar now for DFO's **Hawkwatch introductory meeting on Feb. 22 at 7 p.m. MST**. You'll attend from the comfort of home; the gathering will be via the Zoom meeting app. Leading the presentation will be **Dave Hill**, a veteran hawk watcher and my immediate predecessor as DFO president. Dave's session is guaranteed to enhance your raptor ID skills and give you a taste of what Hawkwatch volunteering is about. After that, sign up for a special DFO field trip and orientation walk at Dinosaur Ridge on the following Saturday, Feb. 26.

None of this would be possible if not for the impassioned leadership of Dave and the rest of his capable, intrepid Hawkwatch team, including **Carol Cwiklinski**, **Mike Fernandez** and **Janet Peters**. I cannot offer enough thanks and praise for this "Fantastic Four." They have negotiated with Jeffco Open Space, drafted the hawk counter job description, helped develop our partnerships and promotional materials, and are applying for a supporting grant from Hawk Migration Association of North America, which collects raptor migration data from nearly 200 monitoring sites including ours at Dinosaur Ridge. To quote Dave: "We've come a long way with our effort and have made wonderful progress actualizing our vision of a well-staffed, well-supported Hawkwatch at Dinosaur Ridge."

You said it all, Dave. And now, how about YOU, dear readers?

— Susan

ON THE COVER

If it's winter, Colorado can expect visits from the Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*), which nests in cliffs high in the Arctic tundra but drifts southward in winter to glide and hover in hunt for mice and voles. In recent years, though, sightings down here of this long-winged, large-headed buteo seem to have gone spotty at best.

We seem to be seeing more of them just now, however, which is why we're happy to present the Rough-legged as this month's "cover bird." Photographer-birder **Rob Raker**, frequent contributor of cover images for *The Lark Bunting*, spotted this one the day after Christmas as he drove north on C-470 on the west side of Green Mountain in Jefferson County. "I pulled over as it was being harassed by a Common Raven," Raker said. "It's the third one I've seen" this season. "I have a pic of another up by Rocky Flats. Check out the eBird species map and you will see them all over. Way more than usual."

A week after Bob's sighting, **Hugh Kingery**, leading the Black Forest Christmas Bird Count on Jan. 2, 2022 in Douglas, Elbert and El Paso counties, reported to the CoBirds list-serv: "We got most excited by seeing the first Rough-legged Hawks in 3-4 years. We saw 3 of them."

I'll just add that we enjoyed two Rough-legged Hawks at Second Creek Open Space and one at First Creek @ DEN Open Space on DFO field trips I led in late November and early December. I hadn't seen one anywhere myself in nearly 4 years.

Three anecdotes do not a trend make, but it's nice to see these handsome winter raptors again. They stand out overhead when flashing the boldly patterned, black-brown-and-white undersides of their wings (if they are "light-morph" birds, which most in the West are). And also those black "wrist" patches and that white tail "with a dark terminal band," as the Cornell Lab's "All About Birds" describes it.

All are good ways to tell them from our year-round "default" large bird of prey, the Red-tailed Hawk. In fact, the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary's entry for the Rough-legged says its silhouette "suggests a lanky Red-tailed Hawk." (Some even show belly bands.) Its feathered legs, usually visible only when perched or if hovering within eyeshot, give the hawk its name and provide welcome warmth in cold climes.

By eBird's tracking, Rough-legged Hawks begin to show up in Colorado in late September and are seen principally between November and late March, gradually returning north between April and mid-May. Observers on DFO's Hawkwatch raptor migration monitoring at Dinosaur Ridge this spring will undoubtedly see a few en route back to the Arctic. Until then, keep an eye out wherever you're in open country, especially winter fields, plains and prairie. Look closely at hawks perched on utility poles and fence posts, too. And if you see something hovering in place like an impossibly large kestrel or kite, you may be in luck.

— Patrick O'Driscoll

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Denver Christmas count: 100+ species, "respectable" bird numbers, 118 counters

Patrick O'Driscoll and Joey Kellner

More than 100 species, several rarities and a "respectable" total of nearly 23,300 birds were recorded on Saturday, Dec. 18 in the 67th Denver Christmas Bird Count.

With participation and registration coordinated for the second year by Denver Field Ornithologists, 115 counters, many of them DFO members, joined in the community science effort within a 15-mile circle of mostly suburban west-southwest Denver. Field observers and backyard birdwatchers in more than 20 geographical count areas resumed the count after a one-year absence; the 2020 count was canceled because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I thank all of the field observers and feeder watcher for participating," said Denver count compiler **Joey Kellner**, a DFO member and field trip leader. "Special thanks go to the area Leaders and DFO leaders this year who made the Denver CBC a success." He also thanked Colorado Parks & Wildlife, which hosted the post-count compilation meeting at Chatfield State Park headquarters.

At day's end, the Denver tally registered 103 species, with 23,290 individual birds inside the original 15-mile diameter count circle established in 1954 and centered just north of the old Ken Caryl Ranch entrance. No new species were added in 2021, so the running total since the first Denver CBC remains at 202 species.

Participants included 114 observers in the field and one at stationary birdfeeders. That total was markedly lower than in recent previous counts, likely because of continuing Covid concerns. The most recent CBC, in 2019 (about three months before the pandemic started), had 163 counters by comparison. Still, the 2021 turnout was higher than for any Denver CBC before 2011.

Denver's suburban count was one of thousands conducted across the US and the Western Hemisphere as part of National Audubon Society's 122nd annual Christmas Bird Count. Although Audubon's global totals for this count are still being tallied, the previous effort included 2,459 count circles like Denver's, nearly 73,000 observers in the field, and a total of more than 44 million birds of 2,355 different species logged.

Compared with past Denver counts, the 2021 results were slightly above average for number of bird species, and slightly better than the last previous count in 2019. The total was 10 species fewer than the best-ever year of 1977, when observers recorded 113 species. The total of individual birds was below average. That does not indicate a trend, though some measurements nationally have suggested decline since the mid-20th century.

Among the species found in 2021 were five rated as "rare" — seen in fewer than 10 percent of previous Denver counts. They included **Surf Scoter** at Marston Reservoir (second-ever record on the CBC), **American White Pelican** at Chatfield Reservoir and surrounding count areas (third-ever CBC record), **House Wren** in Ken Caryl Ranch (third-ever record), **Spotted Sandpiper** in the Lower South Platte-West count area (fourth-ever record), and **Hermit Thrush**, also in the Lower South Platte-West area (seventh-ever record). The sightings of two Surf Scoters and 14 American White pelicans also marked record high counts for those species.

Also found were eight other species rated "uncommon" (seen in 10-24 percent of previous counts), including **Cackling Goose**, **Tundra Swan**, **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Eurasian Collared-Dove**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Say's Phoebe**, and **Lesser Goldfinch**.

The 10 most numerous species in the count, which combined added up to two-thirds of all birds counted, include:

1. Cackling Goose — 5,213
2. Canada Goose — 4,586
3. Mallard — 1,560
4. House Finch — 769
5. American Coot— 667
6. Red-winged Blackbird — 639
7. European Starling — 627
8. Black-capped Chickadee — 470
9. American Crow — 469
10. Dark-eyed Junco — 469

Continued on page 5

BIRD COUNT *cont from page 4*

Denver count observers headed into the field as early as 6:15 a.m. on a day that was clear to mostly clear, with variable but only light winds (zero to 9 mph). Temperatures ranged widely from minus-2 degrees at one starting point in the foothills to an unseasonably high 55 degrees.

To maintain the scientific index that charts decades of same-day tallies within a count circle, each Christmas count must be conducted on a single calendar day. Other species sighted within three days before or after the count date are duly noted as "count week" species, but they are not added to the official tally. The 2021 Denver CBC had three "count week" species: Least Sandpiper, Black-legged Kittiwake (still never recorded on an official count day) and Horned Lark, a species rarely missed in the Denver count.

Kellner extended an invitation to all DFO members to mark their calendars now for the 68th Denver Christmas Bird Count, scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 17.

EDITOR'S NOTE

To our readers: Join us again in March . . .

As a reminder, this issue of *The Lark Bunting* marks our semi-annual hiatus. As we do in summer with a June-July issue, we now combine the formerly separate February and March issues into this single issue. We first did this in 2021, to take a short mid-winter "breather" for catching up with more of the news and features we deliver to you (almost) every month.

We'll be back in early March with the April 2022 newsletter, refreshed and reloaded to keep you up-to-date with Denver Field Ornithologists news and features. That also marks when Colorado's winter avian visitors begin to return north, and our spring and summer bird residents start to show up again.

What else would YOU like to see in the pages of your DFO newsletter? The lines are open for your suggestions, contributions, critiques and questions. Please let us know! Drop me a line at patodrisk@gmail.com or call me at 303-885-6955.

In the meantime, enjoy Colorado's midwinter birding and look for us here again in March. Thanks for continuing to read as we bring you the bird word from DFO!

— Patrick O'Driscoll
Editor, The Lark Bunting

Welcome to new DFO members

Jane Axtell of Highlands Ranch; Marianne Batchelder, Arvada; Melissa Belmar, Lakewood; Yvonne Berg, Boulder; Audrey Boag, Indian Hills; Cindy Bouldin, Parker; Gary Brower, Englewood; James Cherney and Linda Cherney, Wheat Ridge; Terry Cookro, Denver; Patricia Cuillen and Scott Hathcock, Longmont; Martha Delporte, Lakewood; Fern Epstein, Denver; Ben Fassett, Arvada; Thomas Forre, Lakewood; Cynthia Grover, Fruita; Allen Hagood, Denver; Julie Hendricksen, Denver; Cathy, Alec and Bill Hopping, Littleton; Darcy Juday, Longmont; Sue Kiernan, Greenwood Village; Monica Lenahan and Newton Williams, Westminster; Barbara Masoner, Denver: Dana Miller, Denver; Jim Nachel, Fort Collins; Beth Payne, Colorado Springs; Dan Roddy, Pine; Marjorie Roosevelt, Englewood; Peter Ruprecht, Superior; Yvonne and Max Salfinger, Estes Park; Jason Sell, Evan Sell and Patricia Kuzma Sell, Marshfield; Linda Schmidt, Lakewood; Paul Schreck, Littleton; Sarah Slater, Aurora; Steven Snyder, Arvada; Guillaume Stordeur, Golden; Michael Nicosia and Marc Strong, Aurora: Candace Tomlinson, Wheat Ridge; Ernie Villescas, Denver; Lisa Marie Villiere and Lisa Villiere, Denver; Jillian and Justin Way, Denver; Kathryn White and Hobza/White Family, Denver, and Cheryl Wilcox, Morrison

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Yvonne Berg; Dale Campau; Linda and C. Raymond Clark; Dan and Carol Cook; Kevin Corwin; Christopher Curwen; Angela Grun; Kristine Haglund; Terry and Becca Hammons; Roy Hohn; Sandy Kottke; Debra Lentz; Joe Lupfer and Karen Clark; Linda MacIntyre; Philip McNichols; Patrick O'Driscoll; Jason Sell, Evan Sell and Patricia Kuzma Sell; Paul Slingsby; Sue Summers; Ronald Villiotti; Laura and Wayne Wathen; Kathryn White and Hobza/White Family, and Cheryl Wilcox

Friends of DFO
Kathleen Bahr; Sarah Bradley; Dan and Carol Cook; Kevin Corwin; Patricia Cullen and Scott Hathcock; Terry and Becca Hammons; Jan and Doug Hodous; Roy Hohn; Cathy, Alec and Bill Hopping; Mary Keithler, in memory of Joe Roller; Patrick O'Driscoll; Marjorie Roosevelt; Niña Routh; Camille Schiraldi and Scott Gaffri; Lori Sharp; Steven Snyder; Guillaume Stordeur; Sue Summers; Candace Tomlinson; Peggy Wait and Lowell Baumunk; Laura and Wayne Wathen, and Scott Yarberry

Luke Paterson
The West Australian

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Birding Adventures in Australia's Northern Territory

Luke Paterson
Monday, January 17, 2022
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

EDITOR'S NOTE: A logistics note for this month only — Because of a scheduling conflict, this January program is NOT on the fourth Monday of the month, as all DFO evening program normally are, but on the THIRD Monday. Again, this time only.

First up in the 2022 monthly program series is Australian birding guide **Luke "Hawk Eyes" Paterson**, who will take us on a virtual tour of the best birding sites in the tropical Top End region of Australia's vast, diverse and sparsely populated Northern Territory.

A 21-year veteran guide on birding and photography tours in the Northern Territory, Paterson will explore the Top End's biodiverse range of habitats. The "NT" is home to more than 400 bird species, including Gouldian Finch, Red Goshawk, Rainbow Pitta, White-throated Grasswren, and the Great Bowerbird, whose unique, altar-like courtship structure Paterson visits in this brief YouTube clip.

A former assistant warden at BirdLife Australia's Broome Bird Observatory, Paterson is a winner of the prestigious Brolga Award, given in recognition of his excellence as a tour operator. He will join us from Darwin, capital of Northern Territory, via Zoom for the Jan. 17 program. Registration is required. Go to this link to sign up: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ja28H2XESt6V0_J8-FMw2g

Hooded Parrot
Luke Paterson

Continued on page 7

Black-necked Stork with fish
Luke Paterson

Azure Kingfisher
Luke Paterson

Paul Bannick

Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls

Paul Bannick
Monday, February 28, 2022
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

EDITOR'S NOTE: At the request of this month's presenter, this program will not be recorded or made available on the DFO website.

Join award-winning author and wildlife photographer **Paul Bannick** for a live-only Zoom program built on his best-selling book of the same name, *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*.

Bannick is both author and photographer of two best-sellers: *Owl* (Braided River 2016) and *The Owl and The Woodpecker: Encounters with North America's Most Iconic Birds* (Mountaineers 2008). Washington state's Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle created two traveling exhibits based on *The Owl and the Woodpecker*. And *Owl* received a gold medal in the 2017 Independent Publisher Book Awards' "Animals/Pets" category. Bannick's photography has also won awards in several major nature photography contests, including by *Audubon* magazine and the International Conservation Photography Awards.

Bannick followed all 19 owl species in the US and Canada for *Owl*. His presentation includes photos and video of owls in all four seasons on their territories, from courtship, mating and nesting in spring to fledging and feeding young in summer, and then dispersal in autumn and migrations and competition for food in winter. His book pays special attention to four species: Northern Pygmy-Owl, Great Gray Owl, Burrowing Owl and Snowy Owl.

His photography is found in birding guides from Audubon, Peterson, The Smithsonian and Stokes to the National Wildlife Federation and several volumes of *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. His work has been widely published in a variety of newspapers, magazines, books and publications in parks and refuges across North America and Europe. His photos also are part of several North American traveling exhibits.

Registration is required for this Zoom presentation, and again: It can only be seen live via the Zoom presentation. No recording will be available later if you do not "attend."

Go to this link to sign up: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_rvltcLplTneFI7nM7pTK5g

Continued on page 8

UPCOMING PROGRAMS *cont from page 7*

Scott Weidensaul
Chris DeSorbo

A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory birds

Scott Weidensaul
Monday, March 28, 2022
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

The program in March will be a particularly timely appetizer for the coming spring migration. Joining DFO for a Zoom program co-sponsored with the University of Colorado's Museum of Natural History will be writer-naturalist, bird migration researcher, lecturer and guide **Scott Weidensaul**, author of the best-selling book of the same name, A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds.

A World on the Wing introducers readers to scientists, researchers and bird lovers seeking to preserve global bird migration patterns facing disruption by climate change and other environmental challenges. Kirkus Reviews raved that *A World on the Wing* "belongs in every birder's library."

Another of Weidensaul's more than two dozen previous books, Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2000.

Weidensaul, a Pennsylvania native now living in the northern Appalachians of New Hampshire, is a fellow of the American Ornithological Society and an active field researcher. He co-directs Project Owlnet, a collaboration of 125 banding and research stations studying North American owl migration. For more than 25 years, he has also directed a major study of Northern Saw-Whet Owls.

Weidensaul is co-founder of Project SNOWstorm, which tracks Snowy Owls, and is a founder of Critical Connections, which charts migration of birds that breed in Alaskan national parks. He also co-founded the Northeast Motus Collaboration, a network to track bats, insects and small birds via automated telemetry receivers across the mid-Atlantic and New England.

Registration for this Zoom presentation is required. Look for the registration link and more details on Weidensaul's program in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

2021 Research, Education, and Conservation Grantees Report to DFO

Multiple presenters
Monday, April 25, 2022
7 p.m. MDT

DFO's April program meeting will be a combination of presentations by researchers who received grants in 2021 from DFO's Research, Education and Conservation Grant Fund. Giving a presentation, leading a field trip, or writing a progress report for DFO's newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, are options that grant recipients may use to report to the membership about their research and how they used their grant funds.

Look for more details about this evening of scientific insight in an upcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share club news briefs, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life events, and pretty much any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany.* The Lark Bunting ***welcomes your contributions****. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor* ***Patrick O'Driscoll*** *at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

NOTE! FIELD TRIP SIGNUP CHANGES NOW IN EFFECT

With 2022, Denver Field Ornithologists has made an important change in the timing of registration for each new month's slate of field trips. As of January, DFO now is setting the opening date for trip signups to 2-4 weeks ahead of the trip date, instead of the previous 4-8 weeks. That means new outings scheduled for Feb. 1-15 will go "live" for registration on Jan. 15, 2022, instead of on New Year's Day as was done previously. The other half of new field trips — those scheduled for Feb. 16-28 — will be available for signup on Feb. 1.

Another change already instituted is moving the start time for signups on the first day from the hours before dawn to 12 noon to give those not on night-owl schedules the chance to register when new trips first post. Confused? Read DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian**'s column about the changes in last month's newsletter. You'll find it on **page 15 of the January 2022 issue** of *The Lark Bunting*, in the newsletter archives on the DFO website at https://dfobirds.org/News/LBArchives.aspx. Click through to the 2022 folder.

285! DFOER'S BICYCLE "BIG YEAR" ENDS WITH "SNOW"

DFO member **Scott Somershoe**'s self-powered "Green Big Year" fundraiser across metro Denver ended just before New Year's with a final rarity — and it was practically in his backyard! Somershoe, who set out on New Year's Day 2021 to count as many species as possible in one year solely on foot or by bicycle, clearly heard a Snow Bunting calling on Dec. 30 at Johnson Reservoir in Clement Park, just a few blocks' walk from home. "It was a cool way to end the year, finding a mega-rarity at my own patch," said Scott, who pedaled more than 3,100 miles to notch 285 species in his carbon-free birding initiative.

Now to collect all the per-species donations that hundreds of people pledged. "We got a bunch of donations and new pledges in the last couple days. We could top $40,000 raised when all is done," he said. "Joe would be proud, I hope."

That's the late **Joe Roller**, longtime DFO friend and volunteer in whose name Somershoe raised funds for a new Colorado Field Ornithologists grant program for bird research that will bear Joe's name. "I'm glad I was able to do this in 2021. It kept me sane," said Scott, who wedged his birding in between his day job as regional land bird coordinator for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and family and childcare duties at home. He even kept a blog of his progress (https://jrmemorialgreenbigyear.blogspot.com/).

"It's been a heck of a ride. I really had 'Joe luck' behind me this year," said Somershoe, who did a DFO evening program about his adventure in late September (https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx). "I got everywhere safely. Only had two flats. I missed some birds but not too many. I found so many good birds and documented nearly everything with photos or audio or I saw the bird with others. It was amazing. I'm not religious or spiritual, but dang! Joe was watching my back."

Scott Somershoe

Continued on page 10

NEWS NOTES *cont from page 9*

HERE COMES HAWKWATCH 2022 . . . HAWKEYES READY?

By the time the next issue of *The Lark Bunting* comes out in early March, volunteers for this spring will have just begun this vital DFO community science duty atop Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. Can YOU be there just one day a week to help Hawkwatch count migrating raptors and other birds of prey? The observation period for this daily effort is March 1 through May 7.

An important introductory meeting for prospective Hawkwatch volunteers (everyone welcome!) via Zoom is on **Tuesday, Feb. 22, 7-8:30 p.m. MST**. Anyone interested in volunteering is urged to attend the online gathering, which includes an overview on raptor identification. Registration is simple: Go to this link to contact Hawkwatch coordinator **Dave Hill**: https://dfobirds.org/SendMessage.aspx?id=141

You can also visit DFO's Hawkwatch program page for many more details and background either via the QR Code for your smartphone on this page or via this computer link: https://dfobirds.org/Birds/Hawkwatch.aspx. In addition, five days after the meeting, DFO will conduct a field trip to Dinosaur Ridge on Saturday, Feb. 26 to orient participants directly to the Hawkwatch location.

Denver Field Ornithologists' cooperating partners in Hawkwatch at Dinosaur Ridge include Audubon Denver and Colorado Field Ornithologists. The cumulative results of the nine-week effort go to the Hawk Migration Association of North America, which collects data from nearly 200 raptor-monitoring sites in the US, Canada and Mexico.

Hill's Hawkwatch team has developed a job description for a paid, full-time hawk counter to support volunteer observers this spring. The job notice can be viewed on the DFO website's Hawkwatch page. To view, scan the QR code below.

Between now and the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, watch for additional Hawkwatch information on DFO's Facebook and Instagram sites and other platforms including the Colorado Field Ornithologists' CoBirds listserv.

NEW TASK FORCE TO TACKLE UPDATING DFO LOGO

DFO president **Susan Blansett** has formed a DFO Logo Task Force to work with a qualified graphic artist to develop a new club logo using vector art technology. The new emblem will fill a broad range of uses as the visual "brand" identity of Denver Field Ornithologists. The task force includes five DFO volunteers, each of whom has previously worked in logo development, corporate and/or nonprofit communications, journalism, and/or imagery: **Sharon Tinianow**, **Mike Fernandez**, **Patrick O'Driscoll**, **Jim Esten** and Blansett.

The team aims to create and select a graphically-up-to-date logo that can accommodate higher resolution images for signs, banners and other materials to promote the club and DFO's presence in the community. Although visually pleasing, the present logo featuring a hand painted illustration cannot be reproduced in high enough resolution for trailside signs at Dinosaur Ridge (where DFO leads the spring Hawkwatch count) or a variety of future uses meant to advance the club mission and role. A new image using vector art will allow for enlargement to any needed size or color combination. Logo redesign also will enable DFO to produce distinctive merchandise for members that features the club emblem.

"The Task Force will convene in January," Blansett said in announcing the task force, adding that it will "approach the work in a manner that will result in an image we can all be proud of for years to come."

Regardless of the new design, the present hand-drawn logo will continue to appear as part of the cover nameplate of *The Lark Bunting*, mirroring the DFO's newsletter's namesake, the Colorado state bird.

Diane Roberts

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:
Up close with field trip leader Diane Roberts

Editor's note: ***In the Scope*** *is a series of occasional Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, and other volunteers and members who participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email* The Lark Bunting *at* patodrisk@gmail.com

Name: Diane Roberts
Home city: Highlands Ranch
Occupation: Finance (retired)

How and when I became a birder?

My hobby was mountain biking until a time came that I needed to find a new outdoor hobby. I had just retired, and I went on a walk that **Mary Keithler** led at Westerly Creek in Denver in April 2016. It was one of those meet-up groups, not a DFO trip. I hadn't really birded before. But my daughter thinks I've been birding all along. She tells me that whenever we were out together, I would say, "Look at this bird! Look at that bird!"

When and why I joined DFO?

On that walk with Mary, she was talking about this group called DFO. That's the thing. No matter where you walk or whatever you do, the name DFO always comes up. DFO is always out there. So, when I got home, I researched DFO and joined.

First DFO trip I went on?

It was later the same month as that Westerly Creek walk. April 24, 2016, at Rueter-Hess Reservoir in Douglas County. The trip leaders were DFO's **Mary Cay Burger** and **Tim Ryan** from the Parker Water Department. It was the first of so many DFO field trips. Those trips are where I really learned birding. Sometimes on the trips I lead now, people say, "How do you know so much?" I say, "Well, I went out with DFO." I'm kind of "home-grown" in DFO. I also did Tuesday birders for a couple of years. I carpooled with **Cynthia Madsen** and **Dave Hill**, both DFO trip leaders as well. They were great people to mentor you when you were just starting out and learning things.

How and why I became a trip leader?

(*Trip leader and DFO Field Trip chair*) **David Suddjian** recommended me. I wouldn't have thought of that on my own. I would be remiss if I did not mention him. David has bravely taken all levels of birders, with cars, throughout the state, through the years. I think I probably have been the most frequent participant on his trips to date. I used so many of his trips to develop my skills enough to be a trip leader, which I became as a result. By the way, my first DFO trip was 6,096 eBird checklists ago. A lot of those were on David's trips. He's a master counter and a master birder.

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First field trip I led?

About a year and a half after going on that first DFO trip to Rueter-Hess, I came full circle. I co-led my first trip there, again with Mary Cay and Tim. And I am still co-leading trips there today with my friend Tim.

Favorite trip destination and why?

Never can I pick a favorite trip, so here are some thoughts:

- **Mark Amershek** leads the ever-popular DFO trips to Chico Basin Ranch (in Pueblo and El Paso counties east of Colorado Springs). Until I went on his trip, I didn't know what a cholla cactus was. Now I do, as I am leading trips there at peak times as well. Mark leads that trip in May and in September, basically. There is always such a demand for his trip, I figured I would pick a time before his and pick up some people on the waitlist who wanted to go. I've done that now for 2 years.

Shrike on cholla cactus at Chico Basin
Diane Roberts

- One of my fave trips I ever led was to the Pawnee National Grasslands in search of the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek, their breeding ground. To get there, we drove through total darkness on the Plains. My participants were wondering, "Where is she taking us? Does she know where she's going? Is she lost?" And then we came upon the lek and the birds in daylight. It was like a glory day. Blue skies, not windy. We saw them lekking. Exciting!

Best DFO trip ever?

That's impossible to say. I've learned so much from Mark's Chico Basin trips and from David's traveling trips to the Western Slope. And there was the unforgettable, week-long field trip that **John Breitsch** led through New Mexico in August of 2019. We covered 2,000 miles and recorded 160 species on 45 eBird lists! But if I picked just one trip and said it was "best," then it would slight all the rest.

Field trip philosophy?

I feel I have a DFO field trip perspective unlike many. I have learned my way as a birder by going on these adventures and opportunities of DFO field trips to so many birding hot spots. The experience has given me camaraderie with our wonderful volunteer trip leaders. While I enjoy the Front Range, I love all of Colorado. DFO field trips have been an unimaginable way to see all the natural world the state has to offer.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

I would just say *everywhere*. I can't pick. Costa Rica? Alabama? Hawai'i? They all have their birds.

The next trip I'm leading?

I don't have any scheduled at the moment, but I just finished co-leading an all-day trip on Jan. 3 to Pueblo and Fremont counties with David. (*Editor's note: 76 species!*)

CONSERVATION CORNER

Affordable housing: Build nest spaces for your backyard birds

Sharon Tinianow

During the long nights and short days of winter, my thoughts typically turn to planning a new year of gardening. In fact, this is the perfect time of year to develop a plan for welcoming birds to your own backyard, patio, or balcony, too.

We know habitat loss is the number one threat to birds. In addition to thinking about plants that provide birds with food and incorporating a needed source of water, consider adding a birdhouse to your backyard habitat to support nesting birds.

You can, of course, purchase a birdhouse. But you might want to use these winter days to make your own instead. Whether you buy or make, though, be aware that a lot of birdhouses are actually garden decorations rather than functional nest boxes. Here are some important things to keep in mind:

- Be sure the birdhouse you select is appropriate for one of the species found in your neighborhood. It does no good to put up a bluebird box in the middle of the city.
- Pay attention to the materials used to build the birdhouse. Avoid treated wood; the chemicals can harm birds. The glue in plywood can also be toxic. Cedar wood, ¾-inch thick, is long-lasting and free of toxins.
- Don't include a perch outside the entry hole. Cavity nesting birds don't need one, and a perch only makes it easier for the birds that prey on them to gain access.
- Be sure there are holes in the bottom for drainage and a ¼-inch gap between the sides and roof for ventilation.
- Location, location, location: Make sure where you mount the nest box is sheltered or away from prevailing winds and at the correct height for the species you are trying to attract.
- Make sure the birdhouse can be opened and cleaned out at the end of the nesting season.

A store-bought chickadee nest box
Patrick O'Driscoll

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Black-capped Chickadee, a species in decline, needs nesting options
James Esten

How-to's abound for building your own nestbox
Home Depot

CONSERVATION CORNER *cont from page 13*

There are resources galore for getting started and building or acquiring the right birdhouse for your area and needs. A handy website for focusing in on a particular bird species is The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch at https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/. You select your region and habitat and get a list of birds you might find in your area. When you click on a species, you'll find a whole range of information for providing a birdhouse for that species, including nest box size, where to mount it, the species' nesting period, and whether that species is in decline and, thus, in need of more nesting locations. You can even download a nest box plan and instructions to build one yourself.

If you already own a basic set of hand tools and have worked with wood and hardware before, the YouTube video "Building a Birdhouse – Things to Consider" has useful guidance and construction tips, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhNH5Ma7jfo.

Another YouTube video (kind of mesmerizing with its crisply speeded-up action) shows construction steps to build five different birdhouses. You can email the maker for rough plans. Find it at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtuDZnjsH64. *(** NOTE: I have not followed up on this one myself, but I assume the email on the YouTube page beneath the video still works, and that the plans will include things like dimensions and guidance on materials.)*

If you are a novice builder, consider purchasing a kit. Just be sure, again, that the kit is appropriate for the birds likely to visit your yard and is truly a functional nest box, not a piece of yard art. Building your own birdhouse from a kit is a great project to share with children, too. The PBS home improvement series' *This Old House: Live* YouTube channel even has a 5-minute video on how to involve children safely in building your own birdhouse. Find it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaB4Mm1IRYs.

There are several books about building birdhouses. The National Audubon Society's *Birdhouse Book* is one. *Birdhouses, Boxes & Feeders for the Backyard Hobbyist* by Alan Bridgewater, Gill Bridgewater and Stephen Moss is another. There are also two birdhouse-related books in the Stokes Backyard Nature series by the birdwatching guidebook authors **Donald** and **Lillian Stokes**: *Stokes Birdhouse Book*, also marketed as *The Complete Birdhouse Book*, and *Stokes Bird Gardening Book*. Check out all the offerings at your local library, bookstore or online for more.

If purchasing is more your style, visit one of our local birding supply stores where knowledgeable staff can help you make a good choice for where you live and the birds in your neighborhood.

Whatever choice you make, enjoy the planning process and watching the results come spring.

White-crowned sparrow
Jim Esten

American Kestrel
Jim Esten

Barrows Goldeneye
Jim Esten

Greater White-fronted Goose
Jim Esten

BIRDING

Wood Thrush rush: Welcoming a local rarity . . . and a masked birding MOB

Patrick O'Driscoll

We've all been there, haven't we? The word arrives in an eBird alert, a CoBirds listserv email or by word of mouth. A rare-bird sighting somewhere around Denver or farther up or down the Front Range. A really good one.

And about as fast as you can say "Magnificent Frigatebird" or "Black-legged Kittiwake," the MOB mobilizes — birdwatching shorthand for "**M**any**OB**servers" or "**M**any **O**ther **B**irders. Gyrfalcon's back at the Larimer County landfill! Blackburnian Warbler at First Creek in Denver's Green Valley Ranch! A state-record Ruddy Ground Dove in a yard way out in San Miguel County! They'll flock to the scene.

But if that scene is not a public place, chances are that birding access may be a no-go. Sometimes diplomatic begging doesn't nudge a shy, wary or beleaguered property owner to let the MOB in. The generous welcome to hundreds of grateful birders by the **Gib Rokich** family last spring when a state-record Yellow Grosbeak showed up for 5 days in their rural Huerfano County yard was exceptional and uncommon.

That's why the arrival this past December of a Wood Thrush in a Centennial, CO yard was an early Christmas gift for scores of happy birders. That particular yard belongs to master birder, Tuesday Birders coordinator and DFO member **Cynthia Madsen**. Her uncommon avian visitor couldn't have picked a more welcoming spot . . . or a more sanguine host.

"I think I was more excited than all of my visitors because I had so much fun meeting and visiting with so many of them," said Madsen, who carefully played host to dozens despite the recent Covid-19 surge. "This was definitely a win-win situation."

She first saw the bird on Sunday, Dec. 5 at about 2:30 p.m. With out-of-town family coming for the holidays, she was taking a break from painting her upstairs bedrooms. "What a stroke of luck! It returned on Monday almost at the exact same time," said Cynthia, who dubbed the bird "Woody" but didn't expect it to stick around.

Madsen's Wood Thrush in first snow
Cynthia Madsen

Once her sightings began to show up on the eBird Colorado Rare Bird Alert, Woody Watch was officially underway. Email and calls poured in from birders: Can I drop by to see the thrush? (It was a first record for the species in Arapahoe County.) Madsen's reply to all: Absolutely!

"Visitors began to arrive on Tuesday, Dec. 7 and continued until Dec. 16," said Cynthia, who kept daily lists of who came by. "I counted 66 people that were first-time visitors, but many of them made multiple visits if Woody didn't show up for them on their first try."

At first, people asked to stand somewhere in Madsen's large backyard to wait for the thrush to make one of its brief, unpredictable appearances. But she quickly invited the MOB inside — all masked according to Covid-19 indoor rules. The clear, clean sliding glass doors from her dining room to a small deck provided a broad view of the yard and the two more frequent spots where the bird might show. If it wasn't on

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Madsen, left, and Meg Reck at viewing point
Rob Raker

Some of the MOB awaiting the bird
Cynthia Madsen

the back fence near a pinyon pine that the thrush seemed to favor, it might be dipping into a rock-garden "water feature" just beyond and below the deck. The little waterfall and pool drew Woody (and other birds) to sip and bathe in an exceptionally dry December.

"I felt pretty good that no one had to sit outside and that the dining room offered the best view of the bird's movement without disturbing it," Cynthia said. She cleared away the dining table and filled the space with rows of chairs where the masked MOB could sit quietly and wait. "I called my arrangement 'stadium seating' because I tried to make each row higher than the preceding one."

Her impromptu bleachers were a work in progress. "The hanging light in the dining room isn't problem when the table is under it," Madsen said. "However, when I moved the table, everyone was bumping their head on it." Birder-photographer **Rob Raker** "came to the rescue and asked if I had an S hook." Standing on a chair, he used the hook to raise the lamp out of harm's way. "I did find out, however, how many very tall birders we have," she added. "Some of them were still (bumping) into the lamp."

Cynthia laughed when recalling one particular moment with a roomful of birders: "I was describing to one how exhilarating it was to see everyone so engaged with this beautiful bird, but when all the cameras started clicking away, I felt I was in the midst of the paparazzi!"

Perhaps the funniest moment, she added, "was when **Phil Pratt** walked into the already-crowded room. He held up an imaginary ticket and said something like, 'I think someone is in my seat because I have a ticket for B1.' We all cracked up."

As the days ticked by, Madsen continued to leave detailed instructions and remarks in the comments field of her eBird checklists, which showed up in numerous inboxes via eBird's hourly rare bird alerts. "You are welcome to visit, but please be considerate of the neighbors," one message began. "You may park in my driveway . . . If I am home, you may come in because the kitchen will offer a bit of a blind if the bird shows up. Please wear a mask if you come in. I want everyone to stay safe for the holidays. Thanks." On Day 3 of the thrush's visit, she said she felt "like I have won the lottery with this lovely visitor, and I am more than happy to share the rewards with you all."

Those who recorded their successful sighting at Madsen's house showered her back with thank-yous in their own eBird checklist comments. Being reminded of their appreciation, Madsen smiled but deflected the praise: "This is very kind of you, but it's truly not necessary, because I received my reward every time I saw all the elated expressions on everyone's face as Woody flew in. That was so very special."

After "my dear little Wood Thrush" stopped visiting in mid-December, Madsen remarked: "I feel so honored that it chose my yard to visit and that it stayed as long as it did." Yes indeed — but perhaps not as appreciative as those dozens of birders Cynthia welcomed into her yard, home and life to share her enjoyment of an unexpected rarity.

FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

Yard, patch, county: Matters of scale for developing birders like you and me

Editor's note: ***From the Field with David Suddjian*** *is an occasional column on topics of birding note by DFO's Field Trip chair. Your feedback and ideas are welcome. Contact David at* dsuddjian@gmail.com.

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trips chair

I am a "developing birder" — I seek to continue to learn and grow in my birding skills and my understanding of birds. When I was a new birder, I didn't know much about birds. Every first encounter with a new species was just that — *new*. I had little or no context in which to understand why we were seeing that bird there and then, or what other birds might be around, or much of anything else about the rich variety that would make this new pursuit, this world of birds so exciting and interesting. I did not yet know the species I was discovering as my friends — but I knew I wanted to tap into their magic more deeply.

The context of the birding experience is what brings richness to this passion, this hobby, this obsession. We come to know a whole aspect of the natural world and its parts, how things work and fit together. We learn to identify species in the context of habitat, season, location and the other species around them. As we bird at different scales, we deepen our knowledge and appreciation of birds.

One of the most valuable scales is the "patch." You've probably heard of it. Patch birding is the idea of having nearby areas that we visit again and again over the weeks, months, even years. Some birders visit their patches every day or nearly so. Others may visit weekly or less, but still regularly over the seasons.

That is the key to patch birding: Repeated visits to the same place. Maybe it's a small area that you can cover in 15 minutes or half an hour, like my Littleton Cemetery patch. Perhaps it's a larger, more complex park or place where you can bird in different ways at different times, but all still within your patch. Think of Chatfield or Cherry Creek state parks. Where's *your* patch?

If you're a developing birder (and aren't we all?), the benefit of patch birding in building your birding skills is immediately apparent. Your patch is your turf, and you come to know it inside and out — and yet, you are still amazed by the surprises that turn up in this place you know so well. You discover the timing of species' arrivals and departures, which microhabitats attract which birds, and which rare ones your patch supports. You learn how it changes over time; one spring is not like the next. Local bird populations change. In our patches that we know so well, we observe these changes firsthand.

We also grow from "yard birding." As an even closer-up look, focused on the scale of your own yard (however you may define it), yard birding is even more convenient and easy (unless you're gone at work from dark to dark!). It's a core element in my birding experience. How about yours? Yard birding provides intimate details of the patterns of bird occurrence. Most of us have yards of modest size, maybe in an urban or suburban context with other homes around. Some of us have larger yards in more "natural" settings. Think of your yard as a patch under a magnifying glass. As

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DFO field trippers scanning fields in Larimer County
Dale Pate

we pay closer, daily attention, we get to know individual birds. We see how they come and go from just outside our windows and doors. And once we look closely, the magic begins to emerge — the unexpected and impressive variety of birds that can visit just one yard.

When we step back from birding up close, we can also develop our skills at a broader scale. Here in Colorado, I know a lot about the birds in my home area of Jefferson County, and near where I work in Arapahoe County. But I have come to a much fuller understanding of birds by branching out to other parts of the state. Now I can see how my local yard and patch knowledge fit into the bigger picture of Colorado's birds.

Invariably, the broader picture helps us grow in our ID skills as we encounter more species in more settings. Farther-away counties become like new patches for me. I become familiar with their birds, even if I can't visit as often.

That's the beauty of "county birding." By making repeat visits to other Colorado counties, I learn those areas and their species in the process. Soon, I am also visiting those different spots in different seasons, returning to some and exploring new ones. Just like patch birding, I gain a warmer familiarity with each new county and the avian creatures that live or visit there.

As we begin a new year, it's good to consider how we grow as birders on these different scales. Can I commit to pay more attention to my yard, reporting more often to eBird? Can I designate a new patch to learn about, or redouble my commitment to visit a patch that I've neglected? You may also visit other people's patches as trip leaders share theirs on DFO field trips. Our club's varied, wide-ranging field trips offer many opportunities for birding new counties, too. Come, join one soon for an easy introduction to less-familiar birding regions within our great state.

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
Annual family membership (printed *The Lark Bunting*)	$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	$	_____
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Denver rarity is Pyrrh-fect for DFO's 399th Bird

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH »

Snowy Egret

Jim Esten

Lone Tree Pond
Cherry Creek SP

FROM THE PRESIDENT

By any name, collaboration is still (great) for the birds . . . and for DFO

Susan Blansett

In early February, a merry band of DFO birders flew to Duluth, MN in pursuit of winter North Woods treasure: Great Gray Owls at Sax Zim Bog. Our quest did not disappoint. With the help of an excellent guide, each of us spotted several "lifers" over our 2-1/2 days in the field, and we enjoyed great looks at other more familiar birds.

No doubt, our grand outcome involved luck. But we also benefitted from extended collaboration among the five of us. My only contribution was to reserve our hotel rooms. My four companions researched the best flight deals, reviewed and interviewed guides, labored to ensure that our rental car could seat five adults and gear, and scoped out other potential hotspots. Out of teamwork, success!

As I mentally relived our experience on the trip home, it dawned on me that collaboration has always been essential to DFO's success and a key to most of our accomplishments. Our club's very origin in 1935 was a collaboration between devoted ornithologists and the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now Denver Museum of Nature & Science). Denver Field Ornithologists is known far and wide for high-quality field trips and the training and caliber of our trip leaders. Those are the result of many years of competent leadership and continuous partnership among creative, skilled birding enthusiasts.

We have been a part of cross-organizational collaboration in the continuing effort to protect state-owned Chico Basin Ranch, one of Colorado's richest havens for diverse birdlife. In 2020-21, DFO's Conservation Committee joined with Aiken Audubon, Colorado Field Ornithologists, Denver Audubon and other bird-focused groups to press the State Land Board to make birding a priority "scientific" use at Chico Basin. Our joint effort also heightened the land board's appreciation of the need to preserve prairie habitats by continuing the contract-run livestock and agriculture operation on an unbroken ranch landscape. A similar group collaboration in 2021 helped Colorado Parks & Wildlife improve and regulate access to State Wildlife Areas by birders and other non-hunting/fishing users.

I'm reminded of a wise refrain by my friend and colleague **Clarke Becker**, director of the Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium, which serves 51 of our 64 counties: "We can't do everything, so we focus on what we do best, and link to the rest." That makes a fitting mantra for DFO, too. I believe this attitude — paying attention to our *raison d'etre*, DFO's reason for being — is a prime reason for our club's continued growth. We strive to remain true to what's important for our members *and* for the birds.

Other signs of such collaboration permeate the life of DFO:

- **Hawk Watch**: Working with Jefferson County Open Space, CFO and Denver Audubon, DFO as attracted major donations to our Dinosaur Ridge raptor-migration community science work. As a result, we've hired a professional hawk counter to anchor the team of volunteer spotters for the spring season that began March 1. (Hawk Watch coordinator **Dave Hill** had THIRTY-TWO sign-ups for his raptor ID clinic!)

- **Science**: DFO recently welcomed **Garth Spellman**, curator of ornithology at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science (DMNS), as science adviser to the Conservation Committee. He'll advise on DFO's community science projects and help foster an appreciation for avian research.

- **Zoom presence**: The popularity of DFO's online programming (thank you, Program manager **Bill Turner** and Digital Meeting and Webinar manager **Peter Stoltz**) is also due in part to promotional collaboration with partners like Denver Public Library, the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, The Book Bar and the Boulder Book Store. Our monthly program in April will feature the results of another kind of collaboration — bird-related research projects at area universities made possible in part by grants to students from DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Fund (thank you, Grants chair **Elaine Wagner** and your committee).

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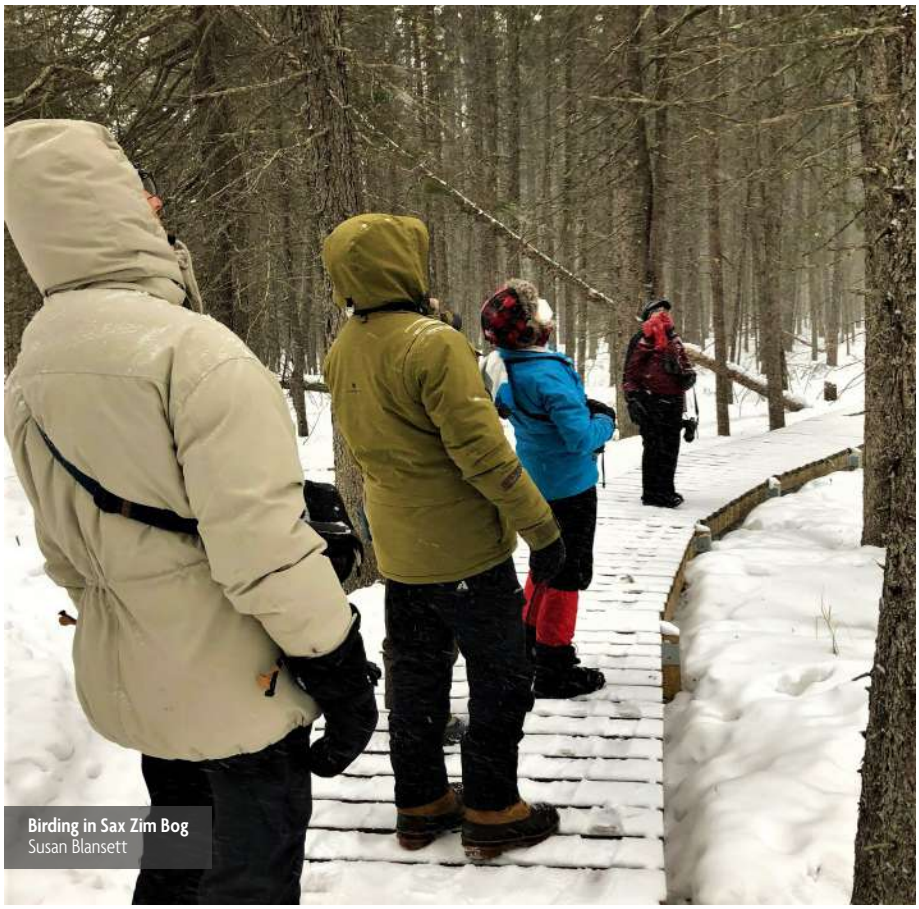

Birding in Sax Zim Bog
Susan Blansett

There's a notable thread running through these and other positive collaborations: Creative and talented volunteers. Remember that it is the *people* who keep DFO vital and responsive, raising the bar (and our membership) ever higher. Expressing your talents through DFO is a great way to make lasting friendships in service of the birds we love. If you have joined our club, consider joining in our volunteer work, won't you? Fill out the form on our website: https://dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Back to the start of this column: I forgot to mention one other contribution to that Sax Zim Bog birding trip to the frozen North. When Yours Truly got our 4WD rental behemoth stuck in deep snow outside a restaurant in Duluth, it took some "collaboration" from a couple of restaurant "volunteers" to help get us out!

One last collaboration note before I sign off until next month. I want to bid a grateful DFO adieu to a special friend, colleague and collaborator, **Suzy Hiskey**, who is leaving Denver Audubon to accept a new role with Water Education Colorado. There, she will lead educational efforts about water use and resources, in pursuit of a more sustainable water future for our state. Perhaps there is yet another collaboration in our future, Suzy? Best of luck to you and thanks for your friendship.

Thanks for reading, everyone. See you in the field,

— Susan

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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As *The Lark Bunting* "goes to press" upon returning from its mid-winter break, birds and birders in Colorado are all on the cusp of what I'll call *winterspring*. Recent thawing after a blustery February of real winter (with actual snow and subzero cold) has us on the literal edge of . . . spring birds? A little migration? Last looks at winter raptors?

Well, the first dozen or so Double-crested Cormorant breeders, reliable returnees in February, are back in their theater-like Duck Lake rookery in Denver City Park. No, wait, check that: They're gone, after another multiday subfreezing blast. Now they're back again (with another 80 or so more). So it goes this time of year, in winterspring.

With March mildness, are your backyard Dark-eyed Juncos suddenly scarce? The Spotted Towhee that has scratched around for birdseed beneath my backyard lilac bush almost daily since mid-November is M.I.A. lately. Or will a March shot of snow and cold bring him and his junco buddies back again?

That brings us to our April 2022 cover bird, which was caught in an elegant pose — looking like some avian form of the self-absorbed Narcissus from Greek myth — by **Jim Esten**, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*. We know that **Snowy Egret** (*Egretta Thula*) wasn't named for what the weather's like when it shows up. But soon we'll be seeing the white-plumed, black-legged waterbirds with vibrant yellow feet that **Terry Tempest Williams** memorably described as wearing "golden slippers" in her classic book *Refuge*.

We start to see Snowys in their usual metro Denver haunts between mid-April and early May as they begin to return north from wintering spots in Mexico, Central and South America. They are the last of our regular colonial waterbirds to arrive, after Great Blue Herons (some of which even stick around through winter), the above-mentioned cormorants, and Black-crowned Night-Herons (late March-early April).

Fun fact: "Egret" is just a name for a small heron. The name derives from *aigrette*, French for "little heron." In fact, the Snowy's lookalike Eurasian cousin is called Little Egret (an occasional visitor to the US via the Caribbean). Both species were hunted to dangerously low levels in the pre-20th century feather trade; their graceful plumes adorned many women's hats. Hunting bans and protective laws allowed both to recover in the 20th century.

Until about four years ago, Snowy Egrets were a high-profile fixture on the nesting island in Ferril Lake, the larger of City Park's two lakes. They would arrive by the dozens in April and May, joining even more Black-crowned Night-Herons in a vibrant nesting colony on the little island. But then, without warning or explanation, both populations (at the time about 25-30 egrets and 70-some herons) abandoned the island during the first 2-3 weeks of June 2019. Even more puzzling: Neither species has returned to nest there again. A handful of night-herons has bred in recent years among the hundreds of cormorants at Duck Lake; a few Snowy Egrets have hung out there before but haven't nested.

But Snowys nest elsewhere in the Denver area, as well as up and down the Front Range and across eastern Colorado. Birders in Denver's Washington Park think some of both species may have relocated there from City Park to nest on the island in Grasmere Lake.

Wherever they choose to nest, we'll be seeing Snowy Egrets again soon, stalking fish in the shallows of lakes and streams . . . . staring as intently as this month's cover bird.

— Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share them: club news, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life (and life bird!) events, and any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany.* The Lark Bunting ***welcomes your contributions****. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor* **Patrick O'Driscoll** *at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

ANNUAL DFO ELECTION COMING IN APRIL

The Nominating Committee of Denver Field Ornithologists has recruited several candidates for the next election of DFO officers and board members, conducted annually in April. As last year, voting this year will be via email. DFO members in good standing are welcome to nominate additional candidates, including themselves. (To nominate or to ask questions, contact Nominations chair **Bea Weaver** at beamiami@aol.com. Members without an email address on file can contact Weaver by phone at 305-498-5935.) The deadline for nominations is March 21.

Candidates declared so far include three of the four present DFO officers. Running for re-election to 1-year terms are President **Susan Blansett** and Vice President **Sharon Tinianow**. The position of Secretary, also for one-year terms, is currently open. Interim Treasurer **Kathy Holland**, appointed in a mid-year shuffle of DFO roles, will stand for election for the first time. Also on the ballot for 3-year terms as board directors are interim member **David Suddjian** (DFO Field Trip chair), former treasurer **Sue Summers** (now Membership chair), and longtime DFO members **Mary Geder** and **Tina Jones**.

The Lark Bunting will publish election details, voting instructions and information about the candidates in the next newsletter, due out in early April.

DINOSAUR RIDGE HAWK WATCH NOW UNDERWAY

After a training session via Zoom and a "test drive" field trip to Dinosaur Ridge in late February, Denver Field Ornithologists' spring Hawk Watch community science project is now underway. Beginning March 1 and running until May 7, this volunteer effort tracks, identifies and counts hawks and other raptors as they migrate north along the Front Range, passing within sight of the observation post on Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. DFO took over coordination in 2021 of this longtime monitoring effort.

This year, with support from other birding organizations, DFO has hired a contract hawk watcher to lead volunteers in this daily effort. She is raptor biologist-naturalist **Emma Riley**, a wildlife biology graduate of Colorado State University. Riley has worked previously in the field with Ferruginous Hawks in Wyoming, breeding passerines in WY and Idaho, and most recently at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, MN during fall migration. On Feb. 26, three days before the start of Hawk Watch 2022, Riley and team members led 23 volunteers on a practice run/field trip up snowy Dinosaur Ridge.

For more information about the program, including how to volunteer, visit the Hawk Watch page on the DFO website at https://dfobirds.org/Birds/Hawkwatch.aspx. Or email DFO Hawk Watch coordinator **Dave Hill** directly at davidhill2357@gmail.com.

Emma Riley and Northern Harrier

Hawk Watch trail sign
Janet Peters

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NEWS NOTES *cont from page 5*

DFO CONSERVATION TEAM'S NEW SCIENCE ADVISER

In an effort to ensure that Denver Field Ornithologists' volunteer community science projects provide useful data, the club's Conservation Committee met in February via Zoom with **Garth Spellman**, curator of ornithology at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. After the wide-ranging conversation, Spellman agreed to serve as science adviser to the committee. At present, DFO community science includes annual spring, fall and Christmas bird counts and two ongoing projects: Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch (spring raptor migration monitoring) and the Colonial Waterbirds Project (observation of annual nesting and fledging of cormorant, heron and egret young at several group nesting sites in metro Denver).

In following the club's mission of informing, educating and advocating for bird conservation, the committee aims to expand DFO's research stewardship role by sharing bird-related science with club members and the public. Spellman has offered to contact ornithological researchers in Colorado and collect published work from them that might interest the DFO membership in abridged summaries in the pages of *The Lark Bunting*.

Garth Spellman
DMNS

Spellman's advice from time to time on bird conservation will come with the proviso that it is not in his official capacity with the museum. Nor will he be able to join DFO in any efforts that constitute advocacy.

During the Feb. 10 meeting, Spellman noted that Colorado is a good place for DFO to collect data and ask avian research questions because there are lots of ornithologists in the state who may be able to provide answers. Spellman also said surveys show a large percentage of Denver area residents don't regularly travel far outside the city. Thus, their contact, if any, with nature occurs largely in town, including public parks and open spaces. That suggests DFO could pursue more community science opportunities for this local audience.

DFO AWARDS $8,640 IN RESEARCH, EDUCATION GRANTS

A camp for "bird nerds," a birding trail for nature education, and several research projects on Front Range chickadees, wrens and grassland songbirds are among the 2022 recipients of grants from DFO's Research, Education, and Conservation Fund. Thanks to the generosity of DFO members and other donors, the six winning applicants will receive a combined $8,640 in financial aid. The awards, recommended by the DFO Grants Committee and approved in February by the DFO Board of Directors, represent the largest single-year total since the grant fund was created in 1994.

Winning proposals, grant amounts and recipients include:

- *Analyzing grassland birdsong and success at the landscape level* ($1,500), **Leah Crenshaw** (University of Northern Colorado master's candidate)

- *Quantifying Effects of Elevation and Urbanization on Chickadee Nestling Development along the Colorado Front Range* ($2,000), **Mia Larrieu** (University of Colorado Boulder PhD candidate), **Scott Taylor** (co-investigator)

- *Quantifying the Effects of Geographic Isolation on Song Variation Between Populations of Black-Capped Chickadees* ($915), **Olivia Taylor** (CU Boulder undergrad), **Angela Theodosopoulos** (co-investigator), **Scott Taylor** (faculty adviser)

Continued on page 7

NEWS NOTES *cont from page 6*

- *Nature's Educators birding trails* ($1,500), **Devin Jaffee**, nonprofit Nature's Educators, Florence, CO

- *Further Exploration of a Front Range House Wren Contact Zone*, **William Anderson** (CU Boulder master's candidate), **Scott Taylor**, **Erik Funk** (co-investigators)

- *Bird Nerds Camp* ($1,225), **Emma Vasicek**, education/outreach director, Evergreen Audubon

Look for more detailed summaries about all the 2022 projects in an upcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

CONSERVATION ACTION: TABOR LAKE TRAILWORK SURVEY

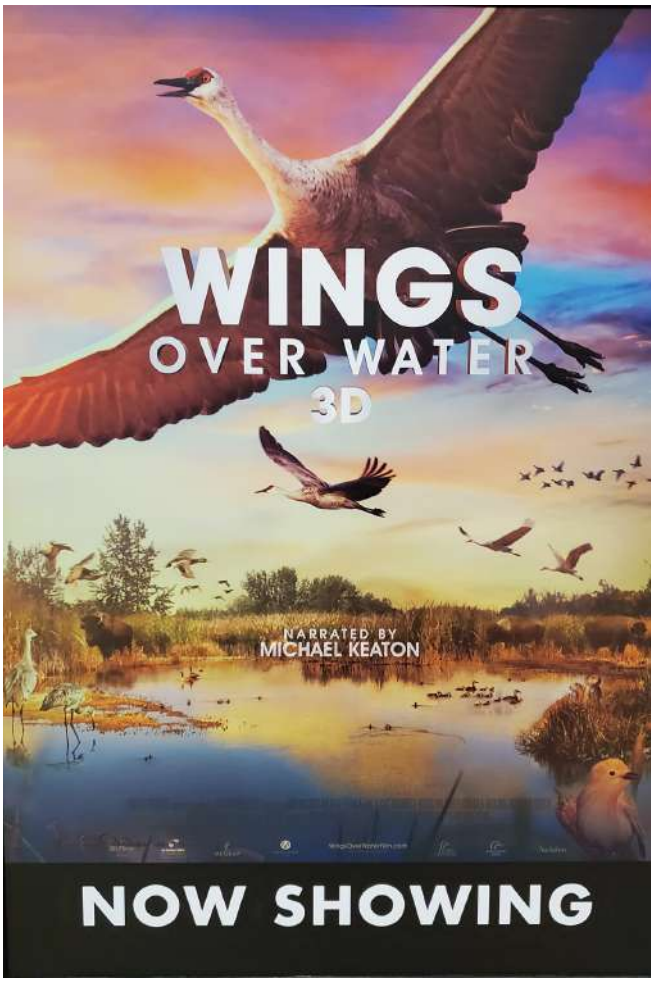
The City of Wheat Ridge is seeking public comment about proposed trail improvements at a popular birding destination: Tabor Lake in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. A short online survey is available on the city's Parks & Recreation webpage until April 1. It seeks to gauge interest in a plan that could include disabled access via Van Gordon Street at the lake's northwest corner. A fishing dock is also under consideration, in addition to reinforcement of the existing "social trail" around the lake to prevent further erosion and habitat loss. To take the survey, visit the Parks & Recreation website at https://www.rootedinfun.com/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=261.

Some birders have expressed concern that improvements could threaten birdlife at Tabor, part of a greenbelt complex where DFO periodically leads field trips and has held the annual club picnic in recent years. The prominent island in the south-center of the lake is a nesting colony for scores of Double-crested Cormorants and a handful of Great Blue Herons and Black-crowned Night-Herons in spring and summer. **Andrew McDonald**, the city's Forestry & Open Space supervisor, said that while non-motorized boating is a priority along with birding and fishing, "we will not be putting in a boat launch at Tabor Lake due to the potential increased impacts to the rookery and bird populations." He said the city already is seeking funds for separate work to repair erosion and "dying vegetation" on the island.

The survey and plan are a collaboration with a team of senior engineering students at Colorado School of Mines. Preparing the plan will earn the students credit as their "capstone" engineering project. "We've asked them to offer a couple of different scenarios" in materials and design features, McDonald said. "Our goal with this trail is restoration." He said any on-the-ground work is probably several years away.

WINGS OVER WATER IMAX FILM AT DMNS THROUGH MARCH 23

In case you've missed it: A spectacular new IMAX 3D documentary of prairie wetlands birds, *Wings Over Water*, is playing daily at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science through March 23. It follows three wetland-dependent species — Sandhill Cranes, Yellow Warblers, and Mallards — on dramatic and challenging journeys home to the prairie to produce their young. Check out the film trailer at the DMNS website. It is guaranteed to rev you up for spring migration! Oh, and the film features one more bit of bird-related trivia: It is narrated by actor **Michael Keaton** — the guy who in 2014 got an Oscar nomination and won the Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild awards for his portrayal of . . . yes, *Birdman*.



Continued on page 8

NEWS NOTES *cont from page 7*

SPEAKING OF WETLANDS . . . A BIRD HAVEN IN SE COLORADO

Check out also the recent feature story in Denver's upstart e-newspaper, *The Colorado Sun*, about May Ranch, a National Audubon-certified "bird-friendly ranch" north of Lamar, CO. Black Rails, Lesser Prairie Chickens and other seldom-seen species have flocked to its 15,000 acres of grasslands, dryland crops and wetlands along Big Sandy Creek. The birds share the ranch with Limousin cattle and abundant wildlife, including endangered black-footed ferrets reintroduced last November. "Birds are an indicator species," rancher **Dallas May** says in a Sand County Foundation video made to mark the ranch's 2021 Leopold Conservation Award. "If we are doing things out here that promote bird habitat, allowing birds to thrive ... every other species of wildlife, plants, insects, the soil, everything will benefit." Read *The Colorado Sun*'s story at https://coloradosun.com/2021/12/05/audubon-certified-beef-colorado-ranch-sustainability-climate-change/

HOME-GROWN VIDEO FOR BEGINNING COLORADO BIRDERS

Debuting on YouTube this winter is *Winging It*, a new Colorado-produced series for beginning birdwatchers hosted by **Kat Bradley-Bennett** of Longmont. The 14-minute first episode, just out in February, focuses on backyard birding as an entryway to the hobby. View it at this link: https://youtu.be/3OswVgYpj_0.

The program, which originates in Boulder County, is presented on Longmont Public Media, the city's YouTube media channel. Subsequent episodes will introduce viewers to choosing birding guides, phone apps and binoculars before the series heads into the field. Bradley-Bennett, a Boulder County native, is an avid photographer; the first *Winging It* episode is filled with photos and video of birds in her own backyard.

This is also a good reminder that DFO's own **Megan Miller** and partner **Jordan Spalding** have created *Let's Go Birding*, a YouTube channel of more than 15 hip, snappy video field trips to familiar Front Range and eastern Colorado destinations. Their ramblings with videographer **Satoshi Machihara** take them from Pawnee National Grasslands to Red Rocks to a Barr Lake stroll with expert DFO birder **Ira Sanders**, as well as bird-specific chases for Long-tailed Duck, Snow Bunting and other rarities. They've also produced quick-hit shorts on bird species ID, each under 1 minute. Visit the eclectic *Let's Go Birding* collection at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1igJwKuxt6O-VJ-bt7SLlw/featured.

Welcome to new DFO members

Jean Bogar of Denver; Larry Bradburn, Thornton; Jeff Cole, Englewood; Jon Deppe and Holly Winters Deppe, Conifer; Elizabeth Fischer. Denver; Carol Gallagher, Castle Rock; Patricia Gearhart, spouse and Chris Gearhart, Morrison; Liz Goehring, Denver; Joan Grant and Tim Duesing, Colorado Springs; Marlee Hassell and Kathryn Wallisch, Denver; Deborah Hebblewhite, Denver; Diane Highbaugh, Englewood; Krista Hinman, Castle Rock; Eric Hoyt, Lyons; Jeremiah Jackson, Arvada; Amy Korengut, Golden; Terri Kurtz, Boulder; Shirley Leow, Aurora; Sean McKeon and Judy McKeon, Golden; Greg Mihalik, Salida; Lindsay Nerad, Golden; Honoria "Honey" Niehaus, Denver; Joann Pettinicchio, Cockeysville; Peggy Pike, Kiowa; Crystal Reser, Denver; Carol Rolland, Wheat Ridge; Charlie Saunders and Mary Saunders, Lakewood; Barbra Sobhani, Littleton; Pamela St. Clair, Longmont; Katelyn TenEyck, Littleton; Ashley Thompson, Broomfield; Natalie Uschner-Arroyo, Lakewood; Jody Walker and David Walker, Parker; Matt Koly and Kate Willeford, Golden; Deb Wittwer, Arvada, and Eric Zarbock, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Janice Arey; Nathaniel and Julia Auckland; Margo Breen; Karel Buckley; Ed Furlong in memory and in honor of Diana and Don Mullineaux; Tina Jones; Phoenix Kwan; Cynthia Madsen; Jean McClenathen; Sean McKeon and Judy McKeon; Michelle McKim; Greg Mihalik; Megan Miller; Lindsay Nerad; Joann Pettinicchio; Betsy Rumely; Robin Sweeney and David Shafer; Diana Tomback; Bobbi Vollmer; Charlene and Bruce Warneke; Bea Weaver, and Tom Whitten

Friends of DFO

Margaret Arp; Jean Bogar; Andrea Cahoon; Jeff and Diane Carter; John Chanin and Holly Sollod; Gail Evans; Lee and Linda Farrell; Georgia Hart; Rex McGehee; Claire Montour; Charlie Saunders and Mary Saunders; Sharon and Jerry Tinianow; Bobbi Vollmer; Diane Wagner; Robyn Winick and Jeremy Winick, and Mary Fran O'Connor

Scott Weidensaul
Chris DeSorbo

MARCH PROGRAM

A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory birds

Scott Weidensaul
Monday, March 28, 2022
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

The program in March will be a particularly timely appetizer for the coming spring migration. Joining DFO for a Zoom program co-sponsored with the University of Colorado's Museum of Natural History will be writer-naturalist, bird migration researcher, lecturer and guide **Scott Weidensaul**, author of the best-selling book of the same name, *A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds*.

A World on the Wing introducers readers to scientists, researchers and bird lovers studying global bird migration patterns, many of which are facing disruption by climate change, human activities, and other environmental challenges. Kirkus Reviews raved that *A World on the Wing* "belongs in every birder's library."

Another of Weidensaul's more than two dozen previous books, *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds*, was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2000.

Weidensaul, a Pennsylvania native now living in the northern Appalachians of New Hampshire, is a fellow of the American Ornithological Society and an active field researcher. He co-directs Project Owlnet, a collaboration of 125 banding and research stations studying North American owl migration. For more than 25 years, he has also directed a major study of Northern Saw-Whet Owls.

Weidensaul is co-founder of Project SNOWstorm, which tracks Snowy Owls, and is a founder of Critical Connections, which charts migration of birds that breed in Alaskan national parks. He also co-founded the Northeast Motus Collaboration, a network to track bats, insects and small birds via automated telemetry receivers across the mid-Atlantic and New England.

Registration for this Zoom presentation is required. Go to this link to register: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_NQw1-eIyTZaf8ul-NYjNbA. Ahead of the March 28 program date, you will receive a link with instructions on how to join the program.

Great Blue Herons
Patrick O'Driscoll

APRIL PROGRAM

From House Wrens to Herons: Updates From DFO-funded Avian Research

Patrick Magee, Noelle Mason, William Anderson
Monday, April 25, 2022
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Each year, recipients of grants from DFO's Research, Education and Conservation Fund report back to the membership about how their projects went. They have three options: Write an article about the project for *The Lark Bunting* (which one 2021 grantee has done in this issue), lead a DFO field trip that incorporates the project subject and location, or give a presentation at a DFO program meeting.

DFO's final monthly program of the winter-spring season is the stage for the third option, with presentations on three of 2021's grant-funded projects. The grantees' research topics include food collection and nesting seasons for Great Blue Herons on a Western Slope river, the use of DNA markers to measure and understand life stress events in the fitness and survival of common bird species, and the use of genome data to understand interbreeding among unrelated lineages of House Wrens on the Front Range. Join us for updates on these three projects:

- **Evaluating the Breeding Season Home Range and Foraging Habitats of the Slate River Great Blue Heron**
  Presenter **Patrick Magee**, associate professor of wildlife and conservation biology at Western State University in Gunnison, will discuss a unique and relatively large nesting colony of herons in the Slate River wetlands near Crested Butte, CO. The heronry is potentially threatened by water recreation below it on the river. This research is part of a long-running (4 years) WSU program that coordinates with local efforts for managing on-site activity and limiting negative effects on the colony. (As faculty adviser, Magee is presenting in place of the original student grantee, **Jake Bartholomew**, who had to withdraw.)

- **Rate of Avian Telomere Shortening Across DNA Sample Types**
  Presenter **Noelle Mason**, an undergraduate student at Colorado State University, took blood samples throughout breeding season from common songbird species (chickadees, finches, sparrows, nuthatches) netted in the birdfeeder complex at CSU's 212-acre Environmental Learning Center. Back in the lab, Mason measured DNA chromosome segments called telomeres, important biomarkers in gauging the effect of "life stress" on wild bird populations.

- **Hybridization Between Non-sister Lineages of House Wren Along the Front Range of Colorado**
  Presenter **William Anderson**, a master's degree candidate at the University of Colorado Boulder, used whole genome data to explore the evolutionary processes behind two distinct lineages of House Wrens that intermingle and hybridize in a "contact zone" where the Rockies and Plains meet. Understanding this hybrid zone allows for more informed characterization of species limits and ecologies. As variations in House Wrens are much more subtle than other bird species along the Front Range, genomic examination may reveal "cryptic" diversity and fill a considerable knowledge gap about this species.

Registration for this Zoom presentation is required. Go to this link to register:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_qR0dp0nyTw2SWRTL9W3YYw

Felice Lyons
Portrait Innovations

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:
Up close with Felice Lyons, birder and baker

Editor's note: ***In the Scope*** *is a series of occasional Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, and other volunteers and members who participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email* The Lark Bunting *at patodrisk@gmail.com*

Name: Felice Lyons
Home city: Denver
Occupation: Accountant

How and when I became a birder?

I was originally a hiker, having first started when I lived in Michigan between 2000 and 2013. (I am originally from Texas and moved to Colorado in 2013.) In June 2015, I was searching online for a new place to hike here in Colorado when I saw a Roxborough State Park walk and signed up for it. I didn't realize until I got there that the focus of the hike would be on birds. I am glad for my mistake, since I may not have discovered the fun of learning and studying birds otherwise. I find hiking and birding to be peaceful, especially in areas where there is not a great deal of trail traffic. Now here it is, almost seven years later, with me out birding at least a couple of times a week.

When and why I joined DFO?

I purchased a pair of binoculars soon after that walk at Roxborough, and then birded with a few other groups in the area. It was about five months later, in November 2015, that I found DFO while researching groups that led regular bird walks.

First DFO trip I went on?

My first DFO field trip was to Cherry Creek State Park. It was on Nov. 8, 2015, and it was the monthly "wetlands loop" walk that **Karen von Saltza** used to lead on every second Sunday. I remember that the people were friendly, and it was my first visit to Cherry Creek, despite the fact that I live only about 12 minutes from the park. Since then, I have birded in the park about 100 times.

Favorite trip destination and why?

On average, I go on DFO trips at least once or twice a month, but my favorite DFO destination would have to be Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Whenever DFO schedules a trip there, I am usually on it. I also bird the Arsenal by myself on average at least once a week.

Best DFO trip ever?

For me, that would be DFO's week long trip in 2019 to and from southwestern New Mexico, led by **John Breitsch**. It was such great excursion birding, in a broad variety of habitats with a fun group of people.

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DFO's Cupcake Queen with post-field trip goodies
Patrick O'Driscoll

Field trip philosophy?

Having been a hiker prior to moving to Colorado, birding enables me to combine two activities that I really enjoy. For example, before I became a birder, I had joined a hiking group based in the Buena Vista/Salida area. That group was focused on geology, and I had taken a geology class in college and absolutely enjoyed learning that subject. Now, in kind of the same way, I absolutely love acquiring new knowledge in the process of studying birds while doing something I love — hiking.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

Almost anywhere in Arizona, but especially three locations in the southeastern part of the state. They would be new areas for me, with great potential to see and hear new bird species:

- Santa Catalina Mountains (just northeast of Tucson)
- Green Valley and Madera Canyon (south of Tucson)
- Patagonia Lake SP (farther south, about 12 miles from the Mexico border)

The next trip I'm going on?

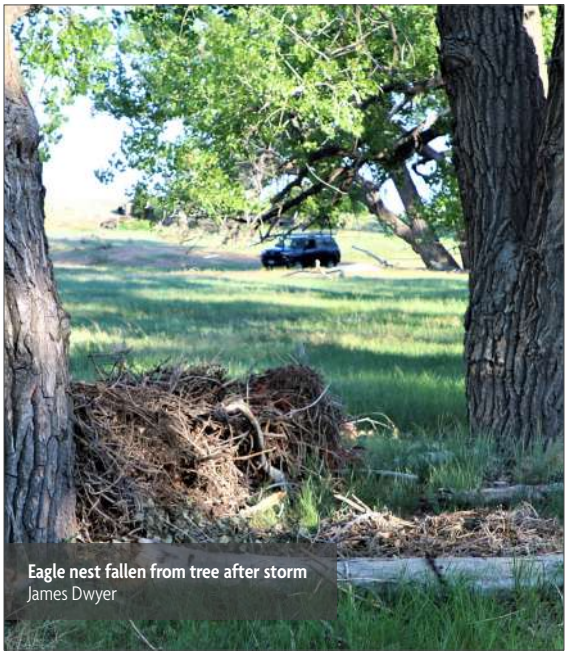
I'm signed up for the March 6 trip to Prospect Park in Wheat Ridge, led by **Susan Blansett**.

Bonus Q: Why I bring home-baked cupcakes and brownies for everyone whenever I go on a DFO trip?

Being from Texas, I come from a very large family, most of whom love to cook. I started baking for co-workers when I was living in Michigan as a way to share sweet treats based on various recipes that I found either online or in the many cookbooks I already own. Now I do it for my DFO friends. The baked goods that my fellow field trip participants seem to like the most include brown sugar-pecan-toffee cupcakes with caramel glaze, brownies with caramel kisses, chocolate chip cookie bars, key lime cupcakes with white chocolate buttercream frosting, red velvet cupcakes with vanilla buttercream frosting, triple lemon cupcakes with lemon glaze, and white chocolate brownies.

Birders focusing in on a DFO field trip
Jim Esten

Golden Eagle nest at experimental range before storm
James Dwyer



Eagle nest fallen from tree after storm
James Dwyer

BIRD SCIENCE

DFO grantees' report: Raptors receding at NE Colorado field site?

Editor's note: DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Fund has supported numerous bird-related research projects in Colorado since its creation in 1994. This article by recipients of one of our 2021 grants is one of the ways we ask those we support to report back to us about their work.

Is Raptor Abundance and Productivity Declining at the Central Plains Experimental Range?

James F. Dwyer, EDM International, Fort Collins
Melissa A. Landon, EDM International (retired)
Angela Dwyer, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, Fort Collins

The short-grass steppe ecosystem at the USDA's Central Plains Experimental Range (CPER), eight miles north of Nunn, CO provides breeding habitat for a variety of medium and large raptors. Species include Golden Eagle, which is a Tier 1 species of conservation concern in Colorado, according to Colorado Parks & Wildlife's State Wildlife Action Plan (2015), and Swainson's Hawk, which is declining throughout its range, according to Cornell's *Birds of the World*. The experimental range is a 15,500-acre grassland and range management research site that also provides breeding habitat for Great Horned Owls and Red-tailed Hawks, two species of least concern that are, nevertheless, affected by a wide variety of human activities.

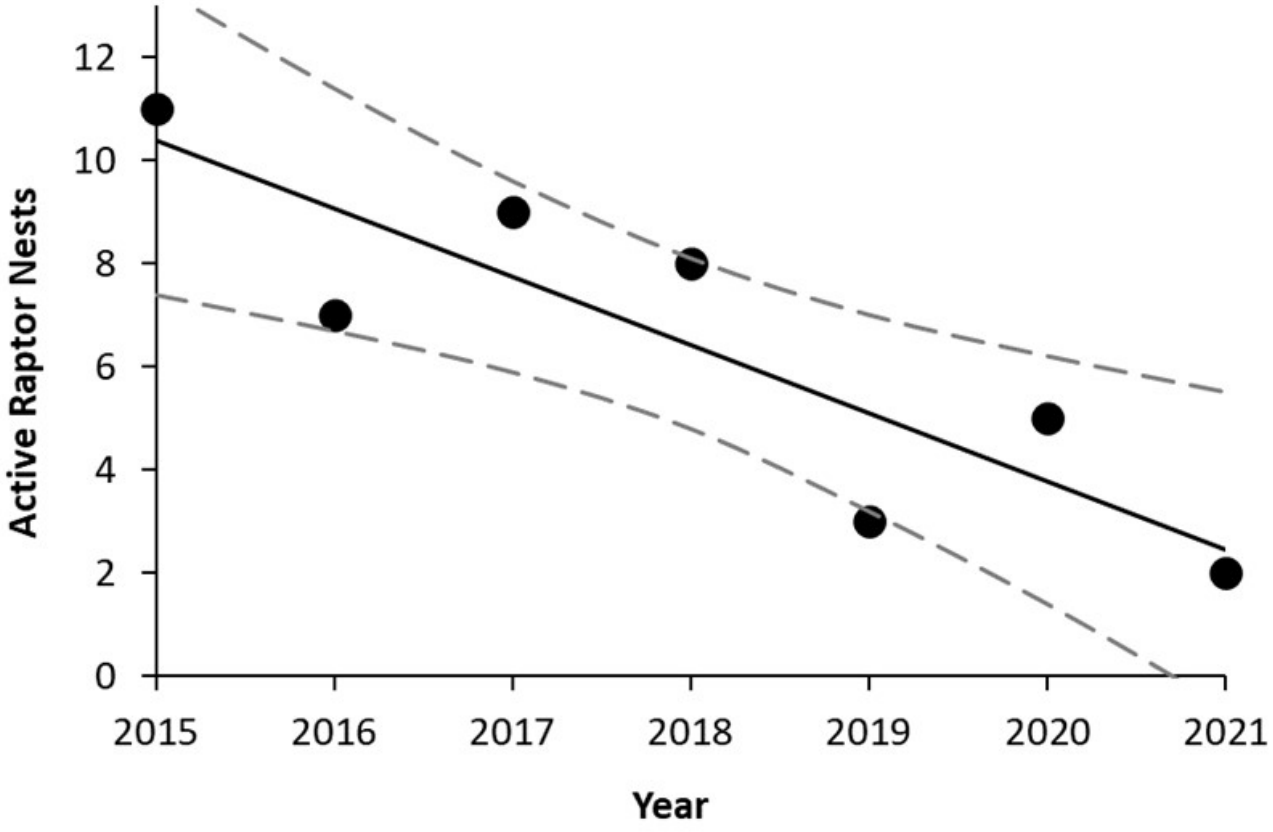
Isolated tree where hawks nest in vast grasslands
James Dwyer

Continued on page 14

RAPTORS *cont from page 13*

In studying the abundance and productivity of raptors at this northeast Colorado location, we have found mortalities of nestlings and fledglings because of nest collapses, predation, summer storms, and vehicle collisions. Breeding birds have died from electrocution, collision with power lines, and fights with other raptors. The deaths we have observed are part of life, and likely would not be of immediate concern in a stable population. However, the raptor population at this location may not be stable. The numbers of nesting attempts and successes appear to have declined during our seven years of observation. We recorded a high of 11 attempted nests with six successful in 2015, and a low of two attempted nests with only one successful in 2021 (*see accompanying chart*).

Given the small sizes of our annual samples, the apparent decline may be only a "blip" that will rebound when we collect additional years of data. On the other hand, the decline may indicate real change. We have observed multiple disturbances near nest sites — for example, morning shooting practice on adjacent public property — as well as construction of multiple new permanent structures on private inholdings within the experimental range boundaries. Increasing vehicle traffic on rural roads may be having an effect as well. Specifically, one of the only two fledgling raptors produced in the study area in 2021 was reportedly struck and killed by a speeding vehicle.



Solid line charts declining trend of raptor nesting attempts each year (dots) at Central Plains Experimental Range

Continued on page 15

RAPTORS *cont from page 14*

Although urban-nesting raptors can tolerate considerable disturbance, raptors in less developed places often do not tolerate disturbance well. It may be that the presence of people on adjacent public lands, private inholdings, and traffic are limiting the nesting success and productivity of raptors on CPER. Alternatively, changes in climate, including the timing, quantity, and type of moisture in the area, may be affecting nestlings. Negative impacts could be indirect (decline or loss of prey populations) or direct (e.g., deaths of nestlings battered by summer hailstorms).

We have also documented physical collapses of numerous nests, including the nest itself sliding out of the tree, the tree branch supporting the nest breaking, even the entire tree collapsing. Is loss of nest trees problematic? Not necessarily. Presumably, trees have been collapsing ever since they first evolved during the Carboniferous period 360 million years ago. Nests must have been falling out of trees since birds first evolved during the Jurassic period 100 million years ago. But without alternative nests sites to transition to, losses of trees may be problematic.

On the other hand, European explorers described the Great Plains as an "ocean of grass" as they traveled westward for days without seeing a tree. Viewed through that lens, the trees that raptors use on the experimental range may not belong there, and the loss of those trees may represent a return to a more natural state. However, North America has experienced a net loss of 3 billion birds since 1970 (Rosenberg et al. 2019). Even habitat generalists like some of the raptors nesting at this research location are less common across their historical ranges than they once were. This has led to concerted efforts to keep common species common. From that point of view, perhaps the raptor population at Central Plains Experimental Range is important even if its survival depends on nest trees that are grassland natives but growing outside of historical locations.

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FIELD TRIP REVIEW

Field Tripping: A seat-of-the-pants ramble through scenic, remote, seldom-visited Las Animas County

Editor's note: ***Field Tripping*** *invites members, whether trip leaders or participants, to share their experience of a recent DFO field trip of note.Want to share your tale from the DFO trail? Contact* ***Patrick O'Driscoll****, editor of* The Lark Bunting*, at* patodrisk@gmail.com.

The trip: Las Animas County, CO
Date: Monday, Jan. 31, 2022
Leader: David Suddjian + 4 participants
Species: 40 across 24 eBird lists

David Suddjian
(with Betsy, Linda, Gary and Pat, below)

Las Animas County is huge (the size of Connecticut) and wild-seeming, with a broad range of habitats perhaps unequaled elsewhere in Colorado: spruce-fir forests, pinyon-juniper canyons, prairie grasslands, cholla cactus flats, even volcanic dikes. On short notice, I decided to lead this outing to a southeast Colorado county that DFO field trips had only visited three times before.

The inspiration was our fun DFO field trip one week earlier to Vogel Canyon in neighboring Otero County. I wanted to visit the similarly juniper-clad canyons of Apishapa State Wildlife Area (SWA), tucked remotely in the north-central knob of Las Animas County. Heralded on the Colorado Field Ornithologists' County Birding page as "truly an undiscovered jewel of SE Colorado," Apishapa gets no birding attention — very few eBird lists, and none of them in winter. So, we aimed to do something worthwhile with our effort. And after exploring Apishapa, we would travel county back roads south to Trinidad. We'd visit Trinidad Lake State Park west of town, and then continue along the Highway of Legends Scenic Byway into the mountains at the shoulders of the Spanish Peaks, ending our day at Bosque Del Oso SWA.

That was my plan, anyway. The exciting reality about unfamiliar county explorations like this is that plans can and do change. Roads don't go through, gates are closed or locked, and, in January, the day comes to an early end.

From Highway 10, which barely touches the northern tip of the county on its northeast-southwest course, it took us 22 miles of empty county roads to finally get down to Apishapa. (Naturally, we saw a Greater Roadrunner en route.) The remote beauty of the place was worth the trek. The junipers in the fingered canyons are large, and the canyon slopes are rocky and rugged. We sampled just a little, enjoying some of the canyon birdlife (Mountain Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Ladder-backed Woodpecker) until mid-morning. Then we proceeded south.

Google Earth showed County Road 77 would get us through to Trinidad, but my atlas suggested the trip could be more complicated down on the ground. Soon we were rolling along a private ranch road, not the county one. There we encountered the ranch's silver-haired owner and her grown son, their cowboy hats tipped forward. Although friendly, they clearly doubted that we could get anywhere from there — they had seen city slickers before. Redirected, we made our way down a different track: County Road 61, from which we saw Horned Lark, Golden Eagle and Rough-legged Hawk. The course change also afforded sweeping vistas of winter ranges arrayed to the west: Culebra Peak, the Spanish Peaks, the Sangre de Cristos and Wet Mountains, flanked on the south by Fishers Peak and on the north by distant Pike's Peak.

By early afternoon we were birding Trinidad Lake SP, enjoying nearby sparrows and distant ducks. We still had time to continue up the Purgatoire River to a last stop at Bosque Del Oso, but the road leading to the wildlife area was locked — a seasonal closure. Our plans changed, but things worked out nicely anyway. The countryside was so gorgeous, we couldn't fail as we continued up the Highway of Legends to see what might catch our eye.

We came to the town of Stonewall, where an exposed volcanic dike dramatically explains the name. The wall of stone took us by surprise as we rounded a bend in fabulous late afternoon light. We stopped, thrilled with the magic of our discovery. A few minutes into our stop, I noticed **Betsy Goodwin** looking hard at a bird perched in a nearby

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aspen over the icy Purgatoire. She wasn't sure what it was, but the shape looked odd. With my binoculars still in the car, I borrowed hers for a look.

"Pygmy-Owl!" I called. Wow! Beauty, exploration, fun birds, new places — and now, the unexpected. Often possible but seldom seen, our Northern Pygmy-Owl was a great field trip prize.

Beautiful land, rocks, sky . . . and "glorious birds"

Southern Colorado has a beauty unto itself, of solitude, quietness, and plants thriving in challenging places. The beauty of rock formations, their mosses and cryptobiotic soil; the beauty of clouds, ever-changing above us; and the beauty of what has brought us out here so early in the day — these glorious birds. My heart catches, then sings when I see the black patches on the underwings of the Rough-legged Hawk, the "horns" of the Horned Lark, the crest and gorgeous eyes of the Juniper Titmouse. It quickens when I see the undulating flight of a Ladder-backed Woodpecker, stand beneath a murder of crows, note the busyness of dabbling ducks, hear the song of the House Finch, and feel the ferociousness of the Northern Pygmy-Owl, a look only the naïve would mistake for adorableness.

— *Betsy Goodwin*

Unknowing, intrigued . . . and all in for 3 new lifers

When this trip offered the opportunity to visit Las Animas County, I was in. There was little data about what we might see (and no promises from David, either). Not knowing where he'd lead us, I was even more intrigued. But we were guaranteed high desert, juniper-and pinyon canyons and mesas, creeks and rivers, and the Spanish Peaks, all seen mostly from dirt roads connecting historic ranches. The one bird I hoped for was Juniper Titmouse, and with good reason. In the past three months, several of these longer DFO day trips had added 12 species to my life list. The Greater Roadrunner we stopped to see at 7:15 a.m. along County Road 77 became life bird 267. Less than two hours later, we got my titmouse at Apishapa SWA. Life bird 268! Fast-forward 6-1/2 hours, as the day was wrapping up. When we stopped to marvel at the rock formation at Stonewall, one of us still had her wits about her (and her binoculars in hand). Thanks to Betsy, we saw my life bird 269 there, a Northern Pygmy-Owl. We were all awestruck!

— *Linda Purcell*

Bonds enriched by good leadership, shared wonders

A collegial bond comes from a shared DFO field trip experience. As we ventured into unpopulated parts of southern Colorado, David focused us with useful bird identification points and behavioral details. We saw expected locals (Greater Roadrunner, Juniper Titmouse, Golden Eagle)

Betsy spots distant owl at Stonewall
David Suddjian

Northern Pygmy-Owl
Gary Witt

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FIELD TRIP REVIEW *cont from page 16*

and winter favorites (Ferruginous and Rough-legged hawks). Bonds are enriched, too, when trip participants know about other natural features around us. When we found our last destination was closed, the geologist among us mentioned an interesting landmark just a few miles ahead. Stopping at Stonewall to admire the volcanic radial dike that gave the town its name, we bonded further, photographing the outcrop in great afternoon light. Then serendipity stepped in. Not 50 feet away, watching us from a tree, was a Northern Pygmy-Owl. It feigned indifference as we scoped and photographed to our hearts' content. What a crowning moment to a day of enjoying a rarely birded portion of the Centennial State.
— Gary Witt

Along lonesome roads, a roadrunner and a lifer
When this trip was announced, I jumped on it. Las Animas County is vast and very scenic, with birds I rarely see near home in Boulder County. The parts I liked best were the long drives on one-lane roads getting to and through Apishapa SWA. Luckily for me, I was sitting on the right side of the car to see the Greater Roadrunner, a real treat. Stopping later in a juniper grove at Apishapa, we spotted a Juniper Titmouse. He seemed as interested in us as we were in him, circling the group, singing loudly and perching atop the trees, giving us great looks and photos. I bird some on Cape Cod, MA, so I know the similar shape of a Tufted Titmouse, which made this bird easy to identify though I'd never seen a Juniper. That spot also had dozens of Mountain Bluebirds and American Robins, and a Ladder-backed Woodpecker, making for a really nice birding experience.
— Pat Cullen

Titmouse at Apishapa SWA
Gary Witt

ESSAY

Bird-ing? Here's to the joys of bird-watching

Jared Del Rosso

One of the first lessons new birdwatchers learn has nothing to do with birds and everything to do with the people who watch them. Those who are serious about watching birds call themselves "birders," eschewing the more generally familiar "bird-watcher" label.

I don't remember when or how I learned this lesson. Certainly, it wasn't from my field guide. Sibley uses the two words interchangeably, though he seems to prefer "birding." Dictionaries, too, don't much distinguish between the two words. Merriam-Webster defines one term by the other — to "bird-watch" is, simply, to bird.

I suspect I learned of the differences from other birders, whether from those I encountered in the field or those who write about birding online. Just google the distinction and you'll find blogs, essays, and articles expounding on differences that are undetectable in the dictionary definitions of the two.

So what's the difference? A *New Yorker* review of the film adaptation of Denver birder and writer **Mark Obmascik**'s The Big Year distinguished the two in this way: "Crudely put, bird-watchers look at birds; birders look for them." Yes, but I think the differences are deeper. Writing last year for National Audubon, **Freya McGregor** described how she often hears birdwatching defined as a more relaxed, leisurely appreciation, while birding focuses on chasing and listing birds, often in a competitive way. Frequently, birdwatching is considered more amateur, while birding's regarded as more serious and legitimate.

Still doubt there's a difference? Google Groups returns but 24 posts from the COBirds listserv that use "bird-watcher." By contrast, it tells me "many" posts use "birder." How many? When I clicked through results of a search on Dec. 21, 2021, I tallied a sizable flock: 1,786 posts of "birders."

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So we think of ourselves as birders, not bird-watchers. We do "watch" birds, but *watching* as a means to an end — identifying bird species, sometimes as many as possible, the "sport" of birding.

I don't want to make too much of this. Many birders are excellent bird-watchers, if we mean the simple act of observing birds to understand them better. Many serious birding outings — whether alone or in groups — have moments of long watching, to enjoy the beauty, behavior, or individuality of the birds we see.

Still, allow me to make the case for the particular joys and passions of bird-watching — watching a bird, *the* bird, closely. In a few moments, I'll tell you about a bird that has done that for me this winter.

You've heard the saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." But between species, familiarity is a prerequisite for understanding. The longer we bird-watchers do our thing — watch a specific bird, species or individual — the more likely we'll get to see birds do theirs. By watching, we may see, hear, and even feel their way of being in the world. "Feel"? Yes, I've had a flock of Bushtits pass closely enough to feel the breeze of all those tiny wings.

Northern Shrike at Willow Spring OS
Jared Del Rosso

Some watchers of birds attend so closely that they even know individual birds, naming specific ones and picking them out of flocks. I am reminded of author **Leonard Dubkin** and his daughter **Pauline** naming pigeons in *The Natural History of a Yard* — and of the great corvid observers **Lyannda Lynn Haupt** and **Bernd Heinrich** doing the same with crows and ravens, respectively. I can't say I know which are the true resident Spotted Towhees in my yard — the Him and Her of that space — or which of the others this winter are their offspring or visitors. I don't think I'd know the difference if another Northern Shrike suddenly replaced the one I've been watching, off and on this winter, at Willow Spring Open Space in Centennial.

Even if we can't yet tell a specific individual, we can still detect a lot. Take that shrike, for instance. I've noticed that the famously unafraid "butcherbird" can be as withdrawing as any other songbird. A male American Kestrel steals its perch, and the shrike retreats, calling in protest as it goes. (*Birds of the World* notes that shrikes on their breeding territory will chase off kestrels. But this young shrike is on winter grounds.) And like the American Tree Sparrows also at Willow Spring this winter, the shrike hid away when a male Northern Harrier, the "gray ghost," coursed through and then above the shrike's hunting ground.

One more thing I've learned. This particular shrike seems to favor small rodents over small songbirds. Though my observations are admittedly limited, I've only seen it pluck rodents from the grasses and weeds. It seems to ignore numerous flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds that fly over. In one hunting attack in the grasses, the shrike landed next to a small flock of tree sparrows yet seemed to ignore them.

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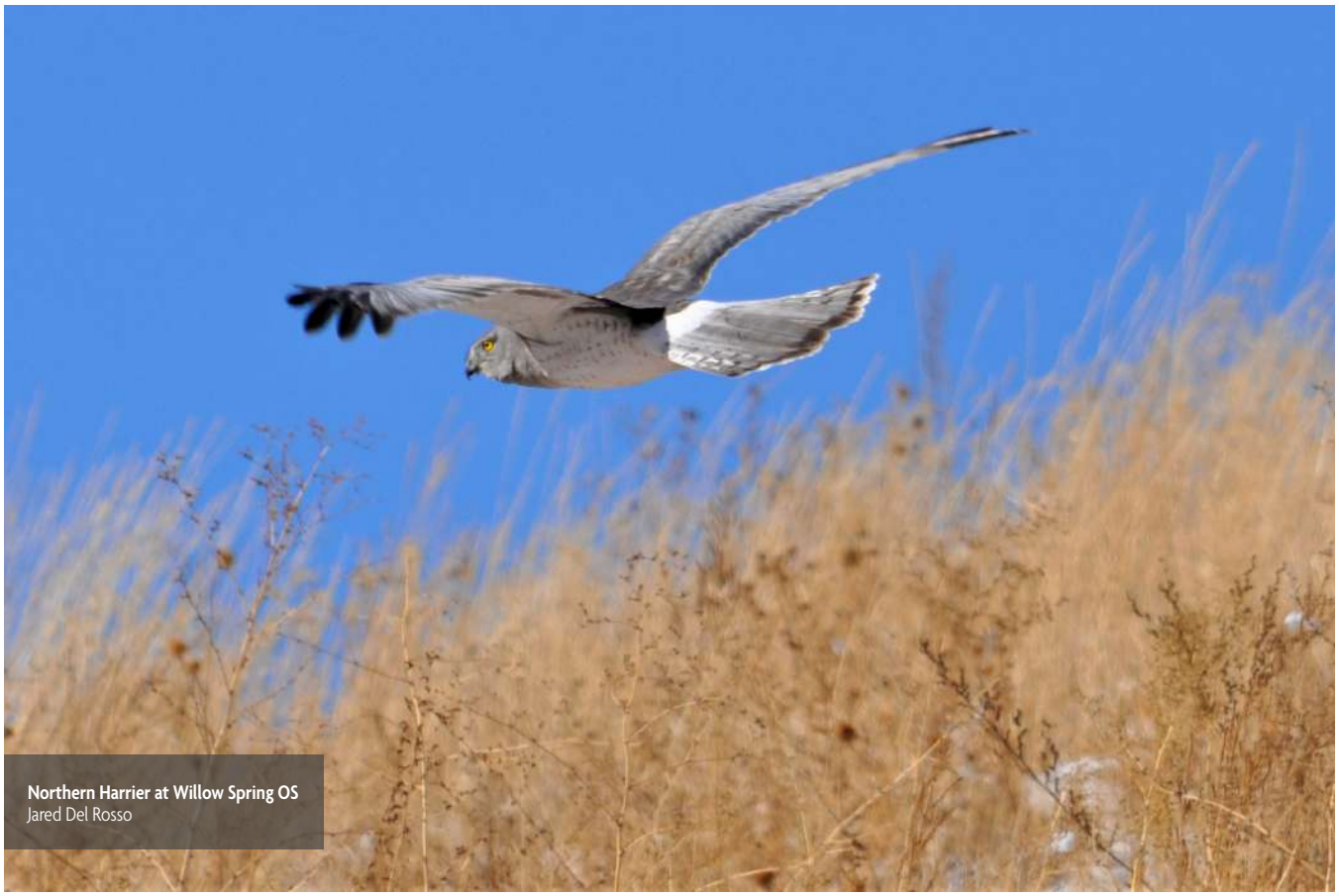
BIRD-WATCHING *cont from page 19*



Northern Harrier at Willow Spring OS
Jared Del Rosso

Birds of the World offers no clue to this shrike's apparent preference. Maybe there are more voles this year. Maybe it's the other predators. Or maybe it's simply this: I haven't yet watched the shrike enough to see its songbird pursuits.

Maybe that's the point (it's certainly one of the pleasures) of bird-watching. It forces us to slow down and notice more about *where* we're watching birds and *what* else is there. Certainly, spending 30-45 minutes in one spot, and returning there frequently means less time in other spots, other habitats — and fewer species per outing. But remaining still, in one small patch, widens our view to other things, doesn't it?

Things like the mammal tracks, the tufts of fur snagged on thorns of wild plum, scat, rodent trails, wasp and spider burrows — not to mention an uncommon or unexpected bird that may happen along as we watch. And also those fall and winter seedy weeds, wildflowers, shrubs and vines, all food sources to be surveyed to see how birds use them, and how that shapes our future bird-watching and birding visits.

Gradually, slowly, but never completely, the places where we bird-watch snap into sharper focus. I've known, in a general way, why I see the shrike, the kestrel, the sparrows, hawks, harriers and coyotes at Willow Spring. It's for food, of course. But the gap between knowing that fact and experiencing it in the birds' everyday actions is as wide and expansive as the open space itself.

One day, might we begin to list bird-watching experiences, observations, and learnings alongside our birding checklists of species and numbers? Stories may be harder to quantify, and eBird won't be keeping state-level rankings of bird-watchers with the most stories. But bird-watching encounters are no less meaningful than birding ones.

FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

Feel that? 2022's dynamic shift for field trips

Editor's note: ***From the Field with David Suddjian*** *is an occasional column on topics of birding note by DFO's Field Trip chair. Your feedback and ideas are welcome. Contact David at dsuddjian@gmail.com.*

David Suddjian

What's more important: A strong start or a strong finish? I think DFO's field trip program for 2022 will have both. We are surely off to a flying start. In the first two months, Denver Field Ornithologists has offered 37 outings — one every two days!

This outstrips even our DFO Big Year pace in 2018 — and we've caught up with it in our bird species count, too. The 143 species we've seen on our trips through February 2022 matches the Big Year number to that point. We have also submitted more eBird checklists from these trips than in the first two months of any other year.

These aren't just the usual slate of field trips, either. DFO has begun offering some trips designed specifically with "developing birders" in mind. These are led and laid out at a slower pace conducive to more learning and in-the-field Q&A. We are also offering some "patch birding" outings in which leaders or guest guides share and showcase personal locations they know intimately from repeated birding visits. Other trips in 2022 already are visiting new places around Colorado where DFO has never been before. A trip in mid-March aims to add three new Colorado counties to DFO's itinerary. Another in May will combine Colorado and New Mexico destinations in one trip.

DFO's calendar of field trips is now more dynamic than it used to be. Since returning from our Covid-19 shutdown, and in response to member demand, we have shifted the trip planning and registration process to shorten the lead time, capturing (and holding) more participant interest in outings just around the bend. Trip leaders can now schedule field trips within just a week or two of posting — sometimes even a day or two when there's a worthwhile "chase" rarity or a new access opportunity.

Recent trips to view the rare Pyrrhuloxia in Denver and to see a convenient-to-view Northern Saw-whet Owl — life-list birding possibilities for our members — are just two examples of impromptu additions that offer on-the-spot opportunities.

DFO field trippers in Las Animas County
David Suddjian

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FROM THE FIELD *cont from page 21*

We want our field trip leaders to act dynamically, and we are happy that they do — adding outings to the calendar whenever it feels right, when they can be sure of their schedules, or when a fresh idea, new destination, or birding trend arises.

Ready for more field trip evolution? In March, we will tweak our trip registration calendars once more, with even more scheduling (and sign-up) convenience in mind.

The DFO webpage will now list all planned field trips for eight weeks ahead of the current date, but with a twist: Sign-ups for each trip will not open until three weeks ahead of the date of that outing. Thus, registration will go "live" when the calendar date for a trip is 21 days away, AND birders will get a farther-ahead glimpse of what trips are coming. One by one, trips will open for sign-ups as their dates approach, on the same schedule for all. This gives birders time to decide which trips interest them and make plans to register when they open. (Some trips, especially multiday or out-of-state excursions, may have even longer lead times for sign-ups if participants need to book lodging ahead of time or deal with other advance logistics.)

Spring is near, with its promise of exciting birding and warmer days. DFO is already planning many outings near and far. Your birding club will be out there, everywhere, seeing so much. I invite every member to join me in thanking our DFO-certified field trip leaders for their passion, time and energy. Thank you, leaders, for making this program possible so that so many local birders can do what we love to do — and do it together.

DFO NEWS

Denver rarity is Pyrrh-fect bird for DFO's 399th

David Suddjian

A Peer-uh-WHAT, you say? That's Pyrrhuloxia! (Pronounced *Peer-uh-LOX-ia*, according to a handy Audubon pronunciation guide.)

To the uninitiated, the word sounds like some mystery disease, but we birders know it's the tongue-twisting name of a close Southwest desert relative of the Northern Cardinal. (In fact, it is called "desert cardinal" in some circles.) Stylish in red crest and wine-splashed breast on overall gray (with yellow beak), it's a bird we all would hope to see on a trip to southeast Arizona, southern New Mexico or southwest Texas. But in northeastern Colorado?

So when one appeared in a west-central Denver neighborhood this winter, it caused more than a stir. Few Pyrrhuloxias had ever been seen in the state; this was said to be just the fourth record. None of the previous birds was recent enough for most of today's birders to have seen. This one had been wintering quietly, under the birding community's radar, until word surfaced in mid-February: Adult bird, visiting yards and alleys in Denver's West Colfax neighborhood, just 2-1/2 blocks from the Perry Street light rail station. Yes: A rarity you could *commute* to!

It didn't hurt that the street in front and alley in back provided good views of the bird's regular perches — leafless winter trees and dry brush in a weedy lot, somewhat evocative of its desert home territory. Even better, the human neighbors were wonderfully understanding and kind to the hundreds of birders who flocked to see the bird.

Among the many who added the Denver "PYRR" to their Colorado, Denver County and personal "life" bird lists was Denver Field Ornithologists itself. DFO keeps an eBird tally of all the species on our field trips, and no previous outing had ever recorded a Pyrrhuloxia. So, a special short-notice "chase" trip was organized to visit Denver's "stakeout Pyrrhuloxia" Hotspot on Feb. 19 to add this bird to our club life list.

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PYRRHULOXIA *cont from page 22*

Pyrrhuloxia in DFO trip sights
Terri Kurtz

Eight birders (two of them first-time DFO field trippers) joined the outing, which wasn't much of a chase. We caravanned in to find two other birders already on the bird. Feeding low in the weeds, it soon moved up in a small tree, showing off its lovely crest and red, black and pink highlights in the early morning light. Then it began to call and sing! This was a memorable full-service rarity: Easy to find, great looks, great sounds . . . we got to stay with it for an entire hour.

Adding to the memory, it was also bird No. 399 on DFO's Colorado life list, just one short of the 400-species mark, a state milestone in itself.

And No. 400 is on the way. Which bird will it be? Just one day after the Pyrrhuloxia chase, another DFO trip tried but failed to add the wintering Pacific Wren on Jefferson County's Bear Creek Trail to the list. But No. 400 will be out there on a DFO trip one day, and sooner than later. Don't be surprised if it's another rarity, too, on a special chase like this one. Here's a toast in advance to that happy occasion.

JANUARY PROGRAM REVIEW

Birding Australia's wild "Top End": Pythons and crocs and fairywrens, oh my!

Patrick O'Driscoll

Broad-brimmed Aussie hat? *Check*. Sun-drenched Aussie grin? *Check*. Snapshot tales of tangles with crocs, snakes, and 'roos? *Check*. Broad *Crocodile Dundee* accent? *Yeh, mait! Deyown Undah, roite?*

Expert Australian birding guide **Luke Paterson** brought some stereotypical (to us Yanks) looks and sounds to his Jan. 17 DFO presentation, "Birding Adventures in Australia's Northern Territory." But with a smile as big as the Outback and an aw-shucks "G'day ev'rybody" greeting, he charmed his Denver Field Ornithologists audience like a he was a tree full of koalas.

"For me, birdwatching is not only a job, it's a passion," Paterson began, opening an hour-long, no-script ramble about the astonishing birdlife in his native "Top End," which is the upper one-third of a north-central Australian territory five times the size of Colorado. "I love seeing the joy of people actually seeing new birds."

Standing before a red brick wall somewhere in his home base — Darwin, the Northern Territory's tropical coastal capital — Paterson led the Zoom audience (of the 130 who tuned in, about 110 stayed) through a nonstop slideshow of Australian delights. Besides a shrike-gobbling python, boxing wallabies and a fish-chomping crocodile, he flashed photo after photo of colorful, alien (to us Yanks) and jaw-dropping birds, from Purple-crowned Fairywrens and Blue-winged Kookaburras to the exceedingly rare Red Goshawk (fewer than 40 breeding pairs in the wild).

View the complete video of **"Birding Adventures in Australia's Northern Territory with Luke Paterson"** in the Past Programs archive on the DFO website: https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx

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Luke Paterson

Although the talk was a bit of an unbranded infomercial for Paterson's guide service (Australian Bird Specialists), it was no hard sell. Smooth, chatty and full of can-you-top-this tales of odd and amazing birds, he delivered an entertaining litany of good reasons for birders getting over Covid cabin fever to travel halfway around the world for a truly wild adventure.

Darwin's tropical location makes it an ideal jumping-off point for an array of close-by habitats, from mudflats with vast shorebird populations to mangrove wetlands and monsoon forests. Around the city alone (population: 127,000, half of the Northern Territory's human inhabitants), there are more than 250 of the Northern Territory's 400-plus species. The rest range from Kakadu National Park east of Darwin, Australia's largest terrestrial national park (7,700 square miles, more than twice the size of Yellowstone) to the Outback drylands 1,000 miles south around Alice Springs and Uluru (aka Ayers Rock).

At one point, Paterson was describing why birding by boat is the best way to see the birds of the mangrove wetlands and floodplains of the Top End. After a brief pause, he delivered an eye-popping lesson about where not to dangle hands or feet over the side of the guideboat. "I can't stress how many crocodiles are out there," he began.

"At the moment, we have about 100,000 just in the Northern Territory alone," he continued. "That's just a very rough estimate. They believe there's many, many more." By the 1970s, saltwater crocodiles had been hunted down to only 3,000, reminiscent of the near-extinction of the American bison in the 19th century. Protected by a hunting ban since the '70s, crocodiles have made an impressive comeback. "Snapping handbags, as we call them, are lurking in pretty much any water body," Paterson said. "Freshwater, saltwater, doesn't matter."

He then shared a true tale from a colleague who had snapshot evidence last year of a 16-1/2-toot crocodile (about the length of an Olympic pole vaulter's pole), in the middle of swallowing a 10-foot croc. "I couldn't believe until I actually saw the photos of this monster crocodile," sitting up in the water and consuming the other one for two hours. "It sat there for about two days just sort of slowly digesting until it had enough energy, I suppose, to take off and go elsewhere . . . They are amazing creatures, I must admit."

So are the birds. Paterson described and showed innumerable richly hued ones on a rainbow spectrum — bee-eaters, pittas, fruit-doves, grasswrens, honeyeaters, finches, parrots and more. Happily for the audience, he did not contain his enthusiasm. "Once again, just magic, magic birds," he gushed at one point through his nonstop smile.

There was a Black-necked Stork swallowing a catfish and a White-bellied Sea Eagle carrying off a Bar-tailed Godwit for lunch. In a video snippet, impossibly cute and colorful Gouldian Finches dipped to drink, wing to wing, at a waterhole — and scattered instantly when a young Brown Goshawk dropped in, looking like an immature Cooper's Hawk not yet proficient at catching its own prey.

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Blue-winged Kookaburra
Luke Paterson

White-throated Grasswren
Luke Paterson

Paterson singled out some even more unusual birds. The Chestnut Rail, big as a chicken, grunts like a pig. One species of owl barks like a dog (the Barking Owl, of course). Magpie Geese, in flocks of tens to hundreds of thousands, sound from a distance "like the humming of bees." A blue-and-white kingfisher stands barely 4 inches tall. (No surprise, it's the Little Kingfisher.) Another kingfisher, the Blue-winged Kookaburra, is as big as a falcon. The Hooded Parrot, in stunning turquoise, yellow and black, nests inside 18-foot termite mounds. The Comb-crested Jacana, called "Jesus bird" because it seems to walk on water in waterlily wetlands, is something else. The female lays the eggs, then leaves them to the male to incubate, hatch and raise.

Even ordinary species seem extraordinary in Australia — like wild flocks of green-and-yellow Budgerigars, better known to non-birders as the domestic parakeet ("budgie"), kept in household cages the world over. Paterson recounted a flock of 3,000 Budgerigars taking flight from a creek bank sounding "like a road train coming," a reference to giant rigs of Australian trucks that pull four semi-trailers behind them, seen (and heard) all over the Northern Territory. "And if there's a raptor chasing them," he added, "Oh! Incredible! . . . It's unreal. Amazing. It's *National Geographic* at its best."

Which, come to think of it, aptly describes Paterson's entertaining DFO presentation.

FEBRUARY PROGRAM REVIEW

Passionate defense of our continent's owls, from Arctic mounds to Florida burrows

Patrick O'Driscoll

Paul Bannick opened his DFO evening presentation February 28 with four words: "My passion is conservation." He might have added "of owls" to that sentence — but within moments, the message was already clear and obvious. North American owls are found in every habitat except the alpine. To understand the needs of owls on this continent is to understand the need for conservation of our public lands.

"We protect what we love, and we love what we know," the Seattle-based wildlife photographer and author continued. "The objective of my book is to help people better know North American owls, so they'll love and protect them" — and protect the places owls depend upon for survival.

"My book" — *Owl: A Year in the Life of North American Owls* (Braided River, 2016) — was the sole subject of Bannick's highly scripted, hour-long presentation to a rapt audience of more than 190 Zoom viewers. It was a nonstop sweep of words (passionate, poetic), photographs (astonishing, awe-inspiring) and sounds (enhanced audio of hoots, calls, shrieks, clacks and whistles, some of them from his own mouth). Across the seasons, Bannick traced the lives of the continent's 19 owl species, from the Snowy and Great Gray of the frozen North to the Burrowing of the West and the Florida Peninsula, and all the others in between. His litany of species, their habits and habitats amounted to a road map to what humans must do "to make sure owls are with us today and in the future."

From the start, Bannick played down owls' image as mystical, other-worldly, enigmatic and all-knowing. "The owl is as grounded as we are to the earth, to water, and clean air and habitat," he asserted, "and without these things . . . the owls are doomed." His descriptions of their seasonal challenges in times of plenty, of scarcity and, always, of danger, swung between heartwarming and heartbreaking.

Take the Snowy Owl, certainly "the most threatened owl of North America," Bannick said. It breeds only when its keystone prey, the lemming, has an exceptional population boom. That erratic, unpredictable rarity can cause the owl population to boom and bust, too. And that's in addition to the threat posed by raids on its low-mound nests by Pomarine Jaegers and Arctic foxes.

Each species tells its own story, Bannick said, through habitats and behavior — life cycles of hunting, nesting and movement. The Northern Spotted Owl, which doesn't migrate, is about old-growth forests — not just for the living trees, but for the "old standing dead" ones in which they nest. That goes as well for the enormous Great Gray Owl ("whose call you feel rather than hear," Bannick said). In our anti-wildfire quest to "clean up" deadwood beneath tall trees, humans deprive not-fully-fledged Great Gray owlets of the downed limbs and leaners they need as ladders to climb from ground explorations to the safety of the nest.

Owl nesting alone spans a wide spectrum: cavities, cliffsides, old raptor nests, abandoned barns, tall grass, short grass, frozen mounds, holes in the ground. Who knew that more than half (10 of our species) use former woodpecker holes for their own nests, from trees and structures to Saguaro cactus in the Arizona desert? Or that Colorado's Flammulated Owl, drawn to old-growth Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir for their profusion of moths, needs cavities in neighboring aspens to nest?

Burrowing Owls, so different from the rest (and so popular here on Colorado's plains), evolved where millions of bison grazed grasslands low enough for the small birds to spot and evade predators in multiple vacant prairie dog holes. Short-eared Owls, by contrast, suffer without taller grass, on which they lay their eggs.

While owls of woods and forest attract mates from perches, Short-eareds must court on open prairie largely devoid of perches. Here's how, in Bannick's words: The male "flies 300, 400, 500 feet up into the air and, at its crest, claps its wings. It sounds like two pieces of plywood slapping together." Then

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Bannock's book cover

he plummets, almost hitting the ground before flying back up to clap and slap again. "Should a female be impressed, she'll rock back and forth in the grass," an invitation for the male to "waddle" across the ground to her. "They will mate in the grass and will spire up into the sky in what is called the sky dance." (No word if they share a cigarette afterwards.)

In concluding, Bannick posed and answered an obvious question: What is the future of owls? "Fortunately, all 19 species here when the first Europeans arrived still are here, but the majority of them fall into the category of 'species of concern.'" Humans should help them by improving habitat, building nest boxes and structures ("Most species will accept them"), landscaping with native plants "so your lands can be habitats for these great birds."

During 15 minutes of Q&A, Colorado Field Ornithologists president **Nick Komar**'s question about a highly charged ethical issue — photographing owls — drew an extended response.

"You know, this is a sobering answer," Bannick began, tacitly acknowledging his role as an owl photographer whose stunning images — the product of thousands of hours of patient pursuit, but pursuit nonetheless — draw more human attention to owls in the wild. "It's gotten so serious that I've actually considered not photographing owls anymore — because whenever people learn about owls they seem to go a little nuts."

He continued: "Most people want to do the right thing; they just may not be aware of what the right thing is. The attention that owls garner is a blessing and a curse." He had stern words for birders and photographers who violate owls' space. He condemned photographers or guides who put out bait "for profit" to draw owls within camera range. "Baited owls are dead owls," he said. "They learn food with humans and food with cars, and they are struck by cars."

Bannick recommended that when we encounter owls, watch for bird signals that we're too close. "They never change their behavior," he said, citing widening eyes, head turns, defecation and, of course, flying off. If you must photograph, use a blind and remain in it for hours. "Don't share (owl) locations with others," he added. "Don't photograph owls with another person. Photograph alone. Every person is going to impact the owl."

As DFO Program chair **Bill Turner** scrolled his Zoom comment screen for attendees' questions to pass on to Bannick, he remarked that there were "lots of comments about how people have enjoyed your commentary, your enthusiasm, your energy and great photography."

That would normally cue this reviewer to direct readers to the DFO website's program pages to view a recording of Bannick's talk for themselves. Alas, in this case that is not possible. Bannick requested that his presentation not be recorded or archived.

Guess you had to be there? Guess so, and sorry if you missed it.

Paul Bannick

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
Annual family membership (printed *The Lark Bunting*)	$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	$	_____
Total	$	_____

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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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DFOBIRDS.ORG

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH »

Western Bluebird

Jim Esten

Chatfield State Park
Douglas/Jefferson Co.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

From state bird to multicolor feather: Evolution of a new DFO emblem and image

Susan Blansett

One evening, most of a decade ago (was it 2015?), I stood near the back of Ricketson Auditorium in the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. It was a DFO monthly program meeting, and the late **Joe Roller**, then our president, announced that a painting by the famed Pueblo artist **Radeaux** would serve as the new image for our newsletter and our club.

On display that night was the lovely likeness of a male Lark Bunting — singing in flight, black and white against golden plain, green Front Range, distant gray peaks, blue Colorado sky. Technically speaking, the painting was not a logo, but we embraced and used it as such. And it served us well: A circular encapsulation of DFO's domain and meaning.

But recently, it had become nearly impossible to use our old image in new, imaginative ways to represent and promote DFO: Banners, trail signs, apparel, "swag" and other uses that rely on a "vector art" image. After some discussion, DFO leadership began the task of developing a new, high-resolution emblem to replace what had become obsolete.

Sharon Tinianow, DFO vice president and chair of Communications & Outreach, led a small task force to brainstorm new logo possibilities. Before long, we commissioned **Jennie Dillon**, the talented graphic artist and layout/design specialist for DFO's newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, to draft and develop prototypes — abstract, concrete and in between.

As the task force progressed, Sharon unearthed some interesting history about how DFO became wedded to the Lark Bunting. From our club's earliest days, it published a monthly bulletin that eventually bore the cumbersome title, *Monthly Report of Field Observations of the Denver Field Ornithologists*. Then in late 1971, bulletin editor **Harold R. Holt**, avian expert and co-author of multiple editions of *A Birder's Guide to Colorado* — still today my go-to source for great birding habitat in every corner of the state — unilaterally decided the state bird should grace the cover of the bulletin. In a spirited dispute over his decision, Holt threatened to resign if the editorial committee didn't agree. From then on, the bulletin was *The Lark Bunting* and images of the bird became synonymous with the club.

Back now to the present and our logo task force. The team decided to sound out DFO's membership in a survey on what you find important about the club. Your candid responses sparked useful word associations in which you saw DFO as educational, knowledgeable, friendly and fun. Your answers told us what you value about DFO:

dfo
DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

Top to bottom:
New DFO logo
DFO emblem with Radeaux painting
Embroidered DFO patch from 1970s

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- Field trips and programs are learning experiences
- We do things together, fostering friendship and a sense of community
- DFO has an important focus on conservation of birds and habitat, and
- We in DFO have fun!

Meanwhile, we knew the club had a good name, "field ornithology" being the science of observing birds in the field (as in our long-running program of field trips). It conveys serious study, enjoyment and concern for birds. And yet, we have been universally known for decades as "DFO," a casual but useful abbreviation, easy to say and remember.

It was apparent that both ways of calling us are important, and that a new image for DFO ought to convey both our serious name and our friendly nickname, casually stated in lowercase: "dfo."

Circling back to our longtime image, the task force had wondered from the start: How wedded are we to that bird, so long associated with the club and its newsletter? It's an oddly chosen state bird that lives in Colorado only seasonally, and only on the eastern plains. Informal asking around on field trips suggested it wasn't very important at all. DFO members, like all birders, get excited about lots of different birds. That set Jennie and the task force free to get more creative.

The resulting multi-colored feather logo you see here today was the unanimous choice of the task force and ratified by the DFO Board of Directors. In its vibrant rainbow, the feather represents *all* birds, *every* bird. It is the most versatile design of several that the task force considered. It will work well in animation as a universal symbol of birds and birding that can float into place gently and magically. The color palette matches both DFO's website and newsletter, and its colors can be rendered in single solids or mixtures in a multitude of ways without losing the logo's contemporary, clean, core essence as DFO. I for one can't wait to wear this logo; it will look great on a field of black or white, dark color or light, T-shirt or cap, handbag or hand towel, neck strap or lanyard . . . the list goes on.

Denver Field Ornithologists has grown monumentally since its founding in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club. Our images have evolved with the club, and today's new emblem is a sign of both vitality and endurance, neither of which will change. I hope you agree that this new logo ably represents what you value about DFO. Let me know what you think, won't you? (susanblansett@gmail.com)

See you in the field,

— Susan

Potential future uses of the new logo

Is there any species of bird that humans imbue more with their yearnings for hope, joy, optimism, and cheerfulness than the bluebird? It's a universal symbol of happiness and a sure sign of spring.

Embedded in so many cultures, bluebird references flutter everywhere — in popular music (from 1934's "Bluebird of Happiness," to innumerable "Bluebird" titles in rock, country, pop, blues, hip-hop) and in literature (poetry, novels), Chinese mythology, Native American folklore, movies, TV, and even Japanese manga. Bluebirds are Twitter's mascot, a brand of flour, a "spirit animal," a make of school bus, a line of lawn mowers, a microphone, and about 200 other commercial products. And here in Colorado, what's our ski country expression for that sunshiny, wide-smile of a morning after a big winter's dump of powdery freshies? That's right: It's a *bluebird* day!

So, look again at that Western Bluebird on the cover of this issue of *The Lark Bunting*. With brilliant blue crown and tidy chestnut vest, he's a little puffed up against the early spring chill. But if smiles gave off heat, anyone seeing him up close would melt those lingering dollops of snow on his perch in no time. **Jim Esten**, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*, found our May cover bird in a small flock at Chatfield SP, above the South Platte River near the Kingfisher Bridge parking lot.

The Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) is one of three bluebirds found in North America, and Colorado is privileged to host all of them: Western and Mountain (mostly summer and some year-round), and Eastern (winter in eastern Colorado). Technically, these are the only true "bluebirds" on the planet — meaning, the blue-colored thrushes native to our continent.

Bluebirds are cavity nesters, and they've had a difficult time in general over the decades, squeezed out of natural nest sites by European Starlings and House Sparrows. Groups like the North American Bluebird Society, founded half a century ago to improve bluebirds' lot, have worked through the decades to build and maintain artificial nest boxes for them.

Here in Colorado, Denver Audubon's Colorado Bluebird Project promotes the cause. If you have driven out by Chatfield, maybe you've noticed the string of bluebird boxes around the grassy grove of pines between the horse stables and the South Wadsworth Boulevard highway. In the high country of Summit County, Mountain and Western bluebirds are happy nesters in dozens of nest boxes around Lake Dillon. The late **Bonnie Boex**, known as the "bird lady" of Dillon, placed and tended to them for years. Other volunteers continue her mission today.

Inside those nest boxes and natural cavities, Western Bluebird females actually build the nests by themselves before laying clutches of up to eight baby blue-colored eggs (and sometimes even two or three clutches in breeding season).

National Audubon rates the Western Bluebird's overall vulnerability to climate change as moderate. In Colorado, climate change means the species actually is gaining more summer habitat, in a wide swath up and down the western two-thirds of the state.
At the same time, however, rising fire weather and heat waves are negatives for the species.

That mixed bag isn't exactly cause for happiness. But look one more time at that cover bird. Still makes you want to sing, doesn't he? And *which* birds fly "Over the Rainbow" and "The White Cliffs of Dover?" That's right — and you can't help but smile when you say (or sing) it: BLUEBIRD!

— Patrick O'Driscoll

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DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share them: club news, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life (and life bird!) events, and any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany. Send your items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor* ***Patrick O'Driscoll*** *at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

Slaty-backed Gull, front, with California Gull at left and 2 Herring Gulls
Chris Gilbert

SLATY-BACKED RARITY: DFO'S 400TH COLORADO BIRD!

Just weeks after nailing down bird No. 399 (Pyrrhuloxia in Denver County) on DFO's eBird list of species seen on field trips in Colorado, quick thinking sent out a DFO "chase" trip in pursuit of another unexpected rarity in March. In a jointly sponsored outing with Colorado Field Ornithologists, DFO scored its 400th Colorado bird on the club's eBird list with a successful sighting of a rare Slaty-backed Gull at Horseshoe Reservoir in Larimer County. DFO trip leader **Chris Gilbert** joined CFO president and gull authority **Nick Komar** in leading more than 30 birders on March 26 to view the seldom-seen species, a sometime-visitor to Alaska but more rarely to other parts of the US.

APRIL IS "LIGHTS OFF" MONTH FOR BIRDS IN COLORADO

On April 1 (not a joke), Colorado Gov. **Jared Polis** declared April as "Lights Off for Bird Migration Month" across the state. In a one-page proclamation with 10 "Wherases" and one "Therefore," the governor:

- Extolled the virtues of protecting the millions of birds that pass through the state each spring and fall
- Highlighted the perils that 80 percent of them face as nighttime migrants, and
- Urged homes and businesses "to turn off all non-essential exterior lights to reduce light pollution so as to provide safer, natural migration routes for birds"

The proclamation was sprinkled with references to birds (Burrowing Owl, Bullock's Oriole and Clark's Nutcracker by name) and Colorado's avian abundance "among the top ten states with the biggest bird lists, with more than 400 species of birds calling it home and 450 migrating through the Central Migration Flyway, including the Centennial State . . .." Read this comprehensive rundown about all aspects of light hazards to migrating birdlife and the month-long observance from Lights Out Colorado, a joint campaign supported by Denver Audubon, Audubon Rockies (regional office of National Audubon) and the International Dark-Sky Association.

WELCOME MORE BIRDERS?

Another wave of popular news coverage about birds and birdwatching appears to be sweeping through Colorado and across the country lately. Some of the recent focus was triggered by interest in escaping outdoors amid the earlier isolation of COVID-19 pandemic life. Perhaps curiosity about our pastime and passion is gaining on the strength of birding's own enduring gifts? Whatever the reason, here is yet another entry in the how-they-see-our-pastime category. This feature article, in the March issue of Denver's *5280* magazine, is aimed at beginner birders, but its sweep is surprisingly extensive and detailed. Beyond the main story are numerous sidebar articles about habitat, specific birds and other aspects of birding in the Centennial State. To read all about it, go to this link: https://www.5280.com/2022/03/where-to-go-birding-in-colorado/.

PEEPING IN PUEBLO: CFO CONVENTION RETURNS AFTER 2-YEAR PAUSE

With the worst of COVID-19 finally behind us, birders are flocking to register for the first Colorado Field Ornithologists state convention since 2019.

Pent-up demand for this popular gathering of birders from across the state has spawned an ambitious list of full- and half-day field trips during the May 19-23 convention at the Hampton Inn & Suites in Pueblo. At last count, CFO plans 18 full-day trips, nine half-day trips and traveling trips for birders en route to and from Pueblo and home locations around Colorado. In addition, there is a welcoming picnic Thursday, social gathering at a local brewpub Friday, scientific session and annual banquet on Saturday, and an entire day of field trips Sunday. For full details and to register, visit the convention webpage at CFO's website: https://cobirds.org/current-convention/.

House Wren
Jim Esten

APRIL PROGRAM

From House Wrens to Herons: Updates From DFO-funded Avian Research

Patrick Magee, Noelle Mason, William Anderson
Monday, April 25, 2022
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

The final installment in the winter-spring series of DFO monthly programs on Zoom (co-sponsored by Denver Public Library) will be a kind of show-and-tell session with three recipients of grants in 2021 from the Denver Field Ornithologists Research, Education and Conservation Fund.

A requirement for all grantees is to report back to the membership about how their DFO-supported work has proceeded. They have three options: Write an article about the project for *The Lark Bunting* (which one 2021 grantee did in the April 2022 issue), lead a DFO field trip that incorporates the project subject and location, or speak about the project work at a DFO program meeting.

DFO's last evening program until fall is this year's stage for the third option, with presentations on three of last year's grant-funded projects. The grantees' research topics include food collection and nesting seasons for Great Blue Herons on a Western Slope river, the use of DNA markers to measure and understand life stress events in the fitness and survival of common bird species, and the use of genome data to understand interbreeding among unrelated lineages of House Wrens on the Front Range. Join us for updates on these three projects:

- **Evaluating the Breeding Season Home Range and Foraging Habitats of the Slate River Great Blue Heron**
  Presenter **Patrick Magee**, associate professor of wildlife and conservation biology at Western State University in Gunnison, will discuss a unique and relatively large nesting colony of herons in the Slate River wetlands near Crested Butte, CO. The heronry is potentially threatened by water recreation below it on the river. This research follows the seasonal characteristics of the colony in nesting and foraging for food. It's part of a long-running (4 years) WSU program that coordinates with local efforts to manage on-site activity and limit negative effects on the colony. (As faculty adviser, Magee is presenting in place of the original student grantee, **Jake Bartholomew**, who had to withdraw.)

- **Rate of Avian Telomere Shortening Across DNA Sample Types**
  Presenter **Noelle Mason**, an undergraduate student at Colorado State University, took blood samples throughout breeding season from common songbird species (chickadees, finches, sparrows, and nuthatches) netted in the bird-feeder complex at CSU's 212-acre Environmental Learning Center. Back in the lab, Mason measured DNA chromosome segments called telomeres, important biomarkers in gauging the effect of "life stress" on wild bird populations.

- **Hybridization Between Non-sister Lineages of House Wren Along the Front Range of Colorado**
  Presenter **William Anderson**, a master's degree candidate at the University of Colorado Boulder, used whole genome data to explore the evolutionary processes behind two distinct lineages of House Wrens that intermingle and hybridize in a "contact zone" where the Rockies and Plains meet. Understanding this hybrid zone allows for more informed characterization of species limits and ecologies. As variations in House Wrens are much more subtle than other bird species along the Front Range, genomic examination may reveal "cryptic" diversity and fill a considerable knowledge gap about this species.

Registration is required for this Zoom session. Do so at this link and you will receive a "JOIN WEBINAR" link from Zoom:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_qR0dp0nyTw2SWRTL9W3YYw

Megan Miller

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:
Up close with trip leader / bird bander Megan Miller

Editor's note: ***In the Scope*** *is a series of Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, and other volunteers and members who participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email* The Lark Bunting *at patodrisk@gmail.com*

Name: Megan Miller
Home city: Littleton
Age: 29
Occupation: Ornithologist!

How and when I became a birder?

Birds have been my guiding interest for as long as I can remember. I first began to notice birds in elementary school when we purchased a finch sock feeder at Home Depot. Within a matter of weeks, a small number of yellow-black-and-olive birds were paying daily visits to my yard. I was immediately captivated by their sad and strangely mechanical calls. I used my teal-blue pocket Golden Guide to identify them as Lesser Goldfinches. In the following years my parents attended many Denver Audubon-sponsored Walk the Wetlands hikes at the Audubon center south of Chatfield State Park, as well as my first frigid Christmas Bird Count along the South Platte River. After high school, I signed up for Denver Audubon's Master Birding Program and completed it while I attended Red Rocks Community College. I also visited the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies banding station regularly through high school and college. At Colorado State University I started a birding club with a life-long birding friend. Our club persists post-COVID, yay!

When and why I joined DFO?

While I was aware of DFO for many years, I didn't become consistently involved or attend regular trips until I graduated from college in 2017. Moving home to Denver after college, I felt completely separate from the local birding community. Many of my previous birding friends had left the state and many, many new birders had joined the community. I wanted to connect with Denver birders again. I also appreciate DFO's flexibility and freedom for trip leaders. It allows me to make trips that accommodate my seasonal and inconsistent schedule. I also enjoy the wide range of trips that DFO offers. There are so many options to visit an enormous range of Colorado habitats with leaders who know them in great detail.

First DFO trip I went on?

I don't remember for certain, but I suspect my first DFO trip was with [*now-retired trip leader*] **Lynn Willcockson** on my first Christmas Bird Count. I think I was in late elementary or early middle school, but I don't recall the exact year. I do remember it was a beautiful, clear blue winter morning and it was FRIGID. We walked a portion of the South Platte (I have no idea where) and stopped at iHOP for lunch, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I also remember a few individual sightings that day, including a neck-banded Canada Goose and an overwintering Black-crowned Night-Heron. I also distinctly remember being in charge of counting starlings and American Robins.

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How/why I became a trip leader?

I became a trip leader partly to integrate back into the Denver birding community as well as to help commit to birding more often. I enjoy "patch birding" and wanted to start a monthly walk at a Denver area location (more about that in my next answer) so I could enjoy watching the changes throughout the year.

First field trip I led?

I think I have only ever led trips at Bluff Lake Nature Center in Denver. It is a small gem in our area and I love watching the wide range of species come and go.

Favorite DFO field trip destination and why?

While I lead monthly trips at Bluff Lake, I don't often go on other DFO trips! I would like to change that in the next year. I have lived in Colorado my entire life and I would like to begin filling in some missing counties. I dislike driving long distances at early and late hours. So if anyone reading this is looking for a birding carpool buddy, I enjoy long rides in the dark, eating lots of snacks before we even start birding, and (accidentally) giving bad directions (sorry **Meredith**!).

Miller glassing birds at Denver's Bluff Lake

Best DFO field trip ever?

Whoops, I guess I need to go on more DFO trips!

My field trip philosophy?

I'm a slow birder and I enjoy watching birds display their natural behaviors. I think slow birding helps encourage folks to enjoy and notice other components of the habitats we visit, whether they are plants, insects, reptiles, geology, or something else. I believe that over time, the slower approach builds a better understanding of the lines connecting birds to plants, bugs, and so on. Alternatively, I'm not against a fast-paced, competitive day of "collecting" species. I often compete with friends in compiling patch and county checklists.

One more thing: I LOVE watching ducks. I love their bizarre, head-popping displays and squeaks . . . and their elaborate plumage and how it changes with the light. I also love SPARROWS: Their delicate streaks and subtle yet complementary color palettes that match their environments so perfectly. Their songs, sometimes so subtle they could pass for a desert insect.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

There are so many! I'd go anywhere, really. China and Australia are atop my list. The Pink-eared Duck *calls to me*.

The next trip I'm leading?

I work out-of-state from April to November for various organizations across the country, most often as a bird bander. My most recent postings were for the University of Utah at a migration station near Moab, UT, and last fall at Wellfleet Bay Wildlife

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IN THE SCOPE *cont from page 8*

Sanctuary and Monomoy Bird Observatory on Cape Cod, MA. Because of my field schedule, I only lead trips December through April-ish and, occasionally, in June and July. Otherwise I will see everyone in the fall! I do dream of leading a trip to the Western Slope and the Moab area, but it doesn't quite line up with my spring seasonal work schedule. However, I've got my fingers crossed for the fall!

Tell us about your "Let's Go Birding" YouTube channel?

Over the years, my partner **Jordan Spalding** and I have imagined performing small skits based on the actual but somewhat surreal conversations we overhear while birding. But acting is hard and I'm not inclined to learn how. Pre-pandemic, we noticed YouTube birding channels were in short supply, so we set out with our friend and videographer, **Satoshi Machihara**, to create one: *Let's Go Birding*. At first, we were going to focus on single eBird hotspots and go over the best ways to bird them. For example, Marston Reservoir in Denver and Jefferson counties is closed to the public, but birders regularly bird it from outside the fence. So we sought to answer questions in each episode about where to park, where to scope from, if it was wheelchair-accessible, if it had public restrooms, etc. But it quickly evolved into a general birding channel when we decided just to go wherever we wanted to go birding. You can view all our episodes so far at this link: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1igJwKuxt6O-VJ-bt7SLlw.

At the moment, new episodes of *Let's Go Birding* are on hold because of the enormous effort it takes for Jordan and Satoshi to edit each episode. So, in the meantime, I recommend following **birding_by_ear** (by expert birder and DFO member **Alison Kondler**) on Instagram and TikTok. She has some beautiful footage and great educational content.

I also run DFO's Instagram page, so if you have fun story ideas, photos, or videos of birds or of people birding, PLEASE reach out to me on IG at **Was_that_an_aardvark** or **denverfieldornithologists**. Or drop me an email at megan.k.miller2473@gmail.com. Be sure to let me know you're a DFO contact or I might not respond.

Miller and Yellow Warbler at banding station

DFO ELECTION

Who's running for DFO office? Here are those up for the April vote

Patrick O'Driscoll

The polls are open, and it's time to vote for new officers and board members for our club. So open that email you received on April 1 (no fooling) and cast your ballot from now through midnight **Sunday, April 24**. Brief bios of all the candidates are below.

As in the past two years, Denver Field Ornithologists members are voting virtually via Survey Monkey, an internet survey app that DFO uses to record ballots. The results will be announced via Zoom on Monday, April 25, at the start of the final DFO monthly program of the season. If you miss the results then, read all about them in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

As outlined in last month's newsletter, members vote for president, vice president, secretary and treasurer (each serves a 1-year term and can run for re-election) and several members of the DFO Board of Directors (each serves a 3-year term and also can run again).

Candidates include three of the four present DFO officers:

- President **Susan Blansett**, running for re-election
- Vice President **Sharon Tinianow**, running for re-election
- Interim Treasurer **Kathy Holland**, appointed in a mid-year shuffle of DFO roles, standing for election for the first time
- Secretary **Peter Stolz** is not running for re-election, and so the position will soon be vacant

Also on the ballot are four candidates for four director seats:

- DFO member **Mary Geder** (a former DFO treasurer)
- DFO member (and former two-time board member) **Tina Jones**
- Interim board member **David Suddjian** (DFO Field Trip chair)
- Former treasurer **Sue Summers** (now Membership chair)

Online voting began on April 1, when DFO emailed all members a Survey Monkey link and instructions for balloting. (If you are a member in good standing and did *not* receive this email, please contact DFO Nominating chair **Bea Weaver** at beamiami@aol.com or DFO vice president Sharon Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com.)

CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT

Susan Blansett

After two years as vice president, **Susan Blansett** is completing her first year as DFO president. She joined the DFO Board in 2016 and has served in numerous other roles, including Nominating Committee chair, interim chair of the Conservation Committee, and member of the Communications & Outreach Committee. She also organized two board retreats and club-wide surveys on topics of importance to DFO members. A Golden resident, Susan spent 30 years in the economic development industry and now works for the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

CANDIDATE FOR VICE PRESIDENT

Sharon Tinianow

Current vice president and chair of the Communications & Outreach Committee, **Sharon Tinianow** (*Tin-YAH-noh*) was previously editor of *The Lark Bunting*. She also serves on the Conservation Committee and leads a task force to create a new DFO logo. Tinianow began birding when she took an ornithology course as an undergraduate student at Kent State University in Ohio. She moved to Denver in 2012 and recently retired from the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History. Sharon lives in Denver.

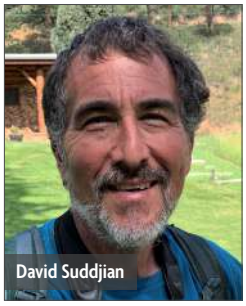
Continued on page 11

Susan Blansett

Sharon Tinianow

Kathy Holland

Tina Jones


David Suddjian

Sue Summers

DFO ELECTION *cont from page 10*

CANDIDATE FOR TREASURER

Kathy Holland

A DFO member since she retired in 2017, **Kathy Holland** became interim club treasurer last November in a shuffle of duties with then-treasurer **Sue Summers**. She now stands for election as required for interim appointees. Before retirement, Holland worked in natural gas marketing and risk analysis, but she also did payroll and kept the books for two restaurants her husband operated for a decade. At age 8, she moved with her family from California to Littleton. More recently, after 14 years in New Mexico, she returned to the Denver area about 4 years ago. Kathy lives in Centennial.

CANDIDATES FOR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Geder

After taking up birding in the late 1990s, **Mary Geder** joined DFO in 2000. She previously served as DFO treasurer (2011-2016), on the Finance and Field Trip committees (she's also a trip leader), and was a field trip scheduler from 2011 to 2020. Before retirement, Geder worked for years as a systems analyst in the oil and gas industry, and previously was a wildlife biologist. In retirement, she enjoys bird-filled travel and volunteering for conservation causes. She also enjoys walks with her dog ("my 'Birder Collie'"), making her yard more "steppe climate-friendly," and "reading — always reading." Mary lives in Lakewood.

Tina Jones

Longtime DFO member **Tina Jones** (since 1977, or 45 years) previously served twice on the DFO Board (2005-09, 2013-17). She seeks to rejoin it "to help out more with DFO's mission, activities, education and purpose." Jones, who also served on DFO's Conservation and Grants committees, has extensive background in Colorado's natural history and native plants. She is past VP of the Colorado Native Plant Society. She also has taught in Denver Audubon's Master Birder program and for other conservation groups. She says she is "particularly interested in spreading the word about ethical birding and ethical yard habitat creation." That means "thinking of the birds' safety when it comes to correct bird houses, the best location for yard plants, and the safest feeding stations." Tina lives in Littleton.

David Suddjian

A field trip leader since 2016, **David Suddjian** was named chair of the Field Trip Committee last August and appointed to the DFO Board. He now stands for board election as required of interim appointees. Suddjian moved to Colorado in 2013 from his native California, where he lived and birded extensively in the Monterey Bay region. He has led more than 200 trips for DFO. He also created DFO's 2018 Big Year, a collective effort to record as many species as possible on club field trips. (The final total was 361, nearly one species per day.) David lives in Ken Caryl Valley.

Sue Summers

After serving as treasurer for the past six years, **Sue Summers** left that post in 2021 to be DFO's Membership chair. The board then appointed her to a vacant board seat. She now stands for election to the board as required of interim appointees. Summers was born and raised in the Seattle area, where she first became a birder. She joined DFO soon after moving to Colorado nine years ago. Summers looks forward to continuing her service on the board and promoting and fostering membership in DFO. Sue lives in Littleton.

Continuing board members not up for election include **Mary Cay Burger**, **Roger Koester** and **Bill Turner** (terms expiring in 2023), and **Karen Drozda**, **Patrick O'Driscoll**, **Steve Ryder** and **Elaine Wagner** (terms expiring in 2024). Past President **Dave Hill** continues as an ex-officio member until 2023.

CONSERVATION CORNER

This window on bird safety is a striking reminder for everyone

Sharon Tinianow

Pop quiz: With spring migration well underway, now is the perfect time to (choose one):

A. Polish your binoculars
B. Re-orient yourself to eBird
C. Plan an exciting spring birding trip
D. Check your windows at home

As much as A, B, and C are worthwhile spring tasks for any birder, D is the only answer focused on protecting the birds we love around the places we live.

The windows in our homes and businesses can be a major threat to birds. In the United States alone, as many as 1 *billion* birds die *every year* in such head-on collisions. Most of those bird-strike losses occur during spring and fall migration.

Contrary to common belief that urban skyscrapers are a high-danger zone for bird-strike deaths, buildings one to three stories tall are actually the most dangerous. That large category includes most single-family homes, duplexes, and row houses — and that's where half of all bird/window crashes occur. The other half of collisions are with structures from three to 11 stories high — the height of most apartment buildings and condos. Not many birds are colliding with windows on the upper floors of taller glass towers. If that seems counterintuitive, read on.

Most of US window-strike victims are songbirds, which tend to migrate at night. As dawn approaches, they drop out of their migration flights to forage for food in shrubs, trees, and planted areas — exactly the sort of landscapes near and around so many one- to 11-story buildings.

Birds cannot see the glass itself. Neither can we, but humans have learned to expect see-through barriers in the window and door openings of our buildings. Because birds have not learned about these hard, transparent, nearly invisible surfaces, they see only the trees and leaves *reflected* in that glass. So, when a bird swoops down to land on what looks like an inviting and sheltering branch, it may slam into a window instead. This high-speed impact usually means immediate death — or an impact so severe that the injured bird becomes helpless prey for other animals.

Perhaps you have also seen birds attacking their own reflections in window glass. But that kind of territorial aggression is typically not harmful. Such birds aren't flying full speed, so they rarely hit the window hard enough to hurt or kill. It's the high-speed impacts that we need to prevent.

The good news is that you can get right to work on this, and with immediate good for bird conservation. If you already have strike-proofed your own windows, share this information with others to improve the survival of more of the birds that share our built world.

Assessing your windows for bird safety is as easy as going outside a few times in the morning to check the reflectivity of your window glass. Windows with screens mounted on the outside tend not to be reflective, so you may not need to take additional protective steps. If your windows do reflect surrounding plants and trees, there are many affordable and attractive solutions.

Ready to start making your windows and yard bird-safe and bird-friendly? Online resources abound. One particularly good one is a husband-and-wife website, Bird Friendly Yards. It includes numerous "window alert" tips and examples, plus this link to download free a comprehensive consumer guide to preventing window bird strikes and collisions: https://birdfriendlyyards.net/consumerguide/. The American Bird Conservancy also has a handy database of resources on its website. Use the search criteria at the upper left of the page to narrow your search. Some of the options include:

- **Paint** — Apply acrylic or tempura paint to the outside of windows in a variety of designs, either freehand or using a stencil. Painted images on the inside won't work because the imagines themselves may reflect the outside landscape.

Continued on page 13

- **Tape** — Feather Friendly makes a kind of tape you can apply to the outside of windows yourself. So does the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) with its "BirdTape." Many other similar products are designed to take the guesswork out of installation.

- **Decals** — Stick-on decals designed to break up the reflection will also work, but only if they are applied to windows so that the spaces between them do not exceed two inches.

- **Cords** — Acopian Birdsavers are spaced rows of thin cords, sometimes dangling a few beads or other small objects and attached to the top of the window like visible strands in a see-through curtain. Unattached at the bottom, they sway in the breeze. You can buy or make them yourself; do-it-yourself instructions are available on YouTube.

- **Shades** — Unlike conventional indoor window treatments, these shades attach on the outside. Made of fabric, Easy Up Shades attach with suction cups. External shades motorized to open and close cost more, but they work well on taller buildings. An added benefit: They reduce cooling costs.

- **Film** — Although a bit more complicated, window film applied on the outside comes in many designs and can last several years.

Top: **Thin cords strung with beads reduce window reflection** (Sharon Tinianow)
Bottom: **ABC BirdTape in chevron pattern prevents window strikes** (Kate Sheppard)

Bird-window strikes are horrifyingly common. You may have heard the sickening *thunk* of a bird hitting a window. Perhaps you have found evidence of a dead or injured bird beneath a window. Maybe you have seen no evidence at all because a scavenger snapped up the dead or wounded bird before you saw it.

Whatever your experience, go outside now to assess your windows and your needs. Treat the most dangerous window first, then work your way around until all your windows are safe for birds. The birds will thank you by continuing to visit your bird-safe setting, providing you hours of continued enjoyment.

Like other Conservation Corner *articles in the DFO newsletter, this is brought to you by the DFO Conservation Committee as it works to tackle major threats to birds. Missed the previous articles? Read them in* The Lark Bunting *archive on the DFO website. Topics include bird-friendly coffee (May 2021), habitat creation with native plants (June 2021), support for the threatened Broad-tailed Hummingbird (July 2021), feral and free-roaming cats (September 2021), and plastics (October 2021).*

FIELD TRIP REVIEW

Field Tripping: 3 days, 3 new counties in the San Luis Valley

The trip: San Luis Valley (Conejos, Costilla, Rio Grande Co.)
Date: Monday-Wednesday, March 14-16, 2022
Leader: David Suddjian + 7 participants
Species: 65 across 52 eBird lists

Sandhill Crane pair at Monte Vista
Linda Purcell

Editor's note: In **Field Tripping**, *DFO members, both trip leaders and participants, share accounts of recent DFO field trips of note. Want to share your words and images from the DFO trail? Contact* ***Patrick O'Driscoll****, editor of* The Lark Bunting, *at* patodrisk@gmail.com.

In mid-March, Denver Field Ornithologists made a historic first field trip visit to Colorado's iconic San Luis Valley in the midst of the annual spring migration of thousands of Sandhill Cranes.

The overnight excursion March 14-16, led by DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian**, added three new counties to the club's Colorado birding record. The first visits were to Costilla County (32 species), Conejos County (27) and Rio Grande County (36). The trip was the club's second-ever visit to Saguache County (adding 27 new species for a county total of 89) and the third visit to Alamosa County (12 new species, new county total of 48).

The trip's star attractions were the Sandhills, seen in all five counties. Another highlight: Sagebrush Sparrow. A misty sunrise with the cranes at Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge was especially memorable, along with a good variety of birds at Smith Reservoir and Russell Lakes State Wildlife Areas.

The successful trip means there are just five Colorado counties remaining for first-time visits on a DFO field trip. All of them are in the southwest part of the Western Slope: Archuleta, Delta, Dolores, Mineral, and San Juan.

Photos top to bottom: **Sandhills in dawn mist at Monte Vista NWR** (Kathy Holland), **Crane liftoff at Smith Reservoir** (Linda Purcell), **Smith Reservoir, blue sky, Blanca Peak** (Linda Purcell), **Sunrise craning at Monte Vista** (Margo Constable)

MARCH PROGRAM REVIEW

Challenges and hope for migratory birds

Marc Strong

In his own words, **Scott Weidensaul** has been "nuts about migration" his whole life. Fifty years ago, he first visited Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania and saw a river of migrating raptors. The experience hooked him on migration, the central focus of his life ever since.

A distinguished bird migration field researcher, co-founder of multiple bird-tracking projects, and prolific author, Weidensaul shared his passion in an enthusiastic March 28 presentation to a large DFO audience via Zoom (275 people attended online). A Pulitzer Prize finalist for a previous book on bird migration, he gave his program the name of his newest bestseller, *A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds*. (Before the talk, **Suzanne Balog** of the Colorado University Museum of History, the program's co-sponsor, announced the book's availability at Boulder Book Store, with a portion of the proceeds to benefit Native American students at CU Boulder.)

PLEASE NOTE: At the presenter's request, the Zoom video of this program, "A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds," is available in the DFO Past Programs archive **ONLY THROUGH MONDAY APRIL 25.** To view before then, go to https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx

Weidensaul opened with the "blockbuster paper" — the journal *Science*'s 2019 report, "Decline of the North American avifauna," documenting the loss of about one-third of North America's birds in the past 50 years. — He focused on a concern that's no surprise in Colorado: Grassland birds are in the most trouble, having declined more than any other type of bird, primarily because of habitat destruction.

Still, Weidensaul offered room for hope. After waterfowl numbers "cratered" in the 1980s from habitat loss and prolonged drought, "we as a society began pouring an enormous amount of money, time, and political will into restoring and enhancing wetland habitats." The birds rebounded dramatically because "if you build it, they will come." His message: Grassland restoration may be hard, but history tells us it's possible.

His optimism is fueled in part by all the information at our fingertips today: Weather radar data, eBird observations, ever-smaller telemetry tracking devices attached to migrating birds. Together, the data riches reveal birds' amazing physiological abilities, "some of which seems more like science fiction than science fact."

Although he didn't elaborate, Weidensaul said birds can "smell their way home across thousands of miles of ocean" by following the odor of dimethyl sulfide produced by concentrations of plankton. Even more mysterious is birds' magnetic sense. He said pigment molecules in birds' eyes become briefly magnetized, giving them the ability to see Earth's magnetic field.

One more amazing feat is the incredibly long time that some birds can stay aloft — seven months a year for Alpine Swifts, for instance, and up to 5 years straight for Sooty Terns. Weidensaul said they do this with something called "unihemispheric sleep." It's an avian ability to keep half the brain awake while the other half sleeps.

Unfortunately, such superpowers can't save birds and habitat from development. Human activity has destroyed more than 60 percent of mudflats around the Yellow Sea, a vital Asian stopover for migrating Spoon-billed Sandpipers. Weidensaul said populations plummeted until conservationists made the bird the "poster child for Yellow Sea conservation." In 2018, China announced sweeping measures to protect the Yellow Sea, and South Korea has followed suit.

Poaching is another human threat. On the island of Cyprus, 80 illegal operations once killed 2.5 million to 3 million songbirds a year for traditional foods, flagrantly flouting European Union regulations. Weidensaul said official crackdowns have cut poaching operators to just two today.

Not every threat is so solvable with direct action. No challenge is bigger than climate change, which throws out of sync the exactly timed return (virtually to the day) of long-distance migrating birds. Called phenological mismatch, this disruption means food and habitat vital to their journey may not be available when the birds arrive.

In Weidensaul's words, migration remains "the black box of a bird's annual cycle," but we are developing tools to open it.

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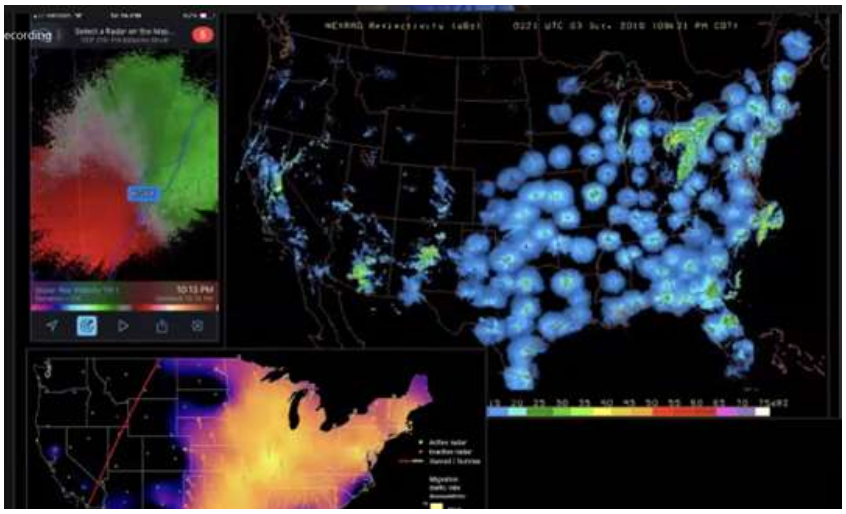
PROGRAM REVIEW *cont from page 16*



Doppler radar not only shows the weather, but also the number of birds flying through it. Decades-old archives of weather data can serve as a "time machine" to track change. He said eBird is another key tool for learning about bird migration. Together, these tools and others can show the best locations and times to concentrate conservation efforts. Where data show just a few days of peak migration, we could ask cities to shut off their disorienting outdoor lights on those days instead of an entire season.

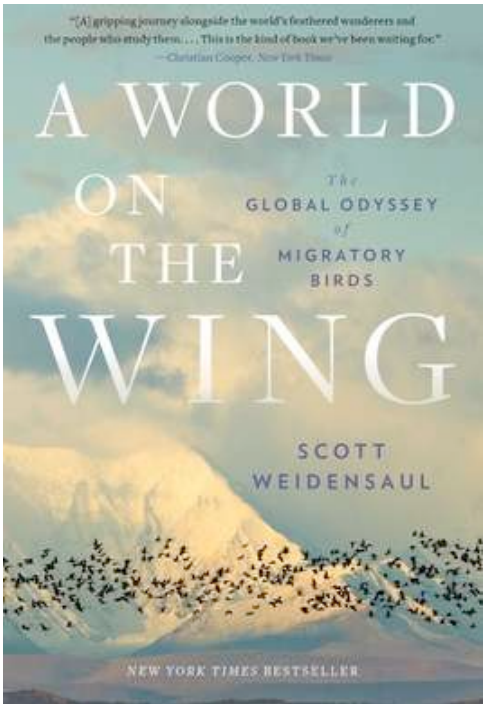
Weidensaul ended his talk with a success story in Nagaland in northeastern India, a stop for millions of Amur Falcons on autumn migration from Siberia, Mongolia, and northern China to wintering grounds in southern Africa. The birds feast there at the emergence of trillions of winged termites. A decade ago, conservation groups discovered that local people were killing more than 140,000 of the birds for food at peak migration. A dam built 10 years before had flooded farm fields that fed and supported them. The conservationists worked with the locals to stop killing falcons by converting the annual falcon-termite spectacle into a birding tourism industry. The killings have since plummeted almost to zero.

"Sometimes hope is the hardest thing to find when you're talking about migration," Weidensaul said. "But then every once in a while, you come across a story that encapsulates a lot of the challenges . . . (and) shows what is possible, even in the most remote parts of the world with some of the poorest people on the planet."

During Q&A, someone asked what birding clubs can do to make a difference without spreading themselves too thin. Weidensaul suggested three key actions:

- Get involved on local land planning and zoning boards: "That's where land conservation decisions are made."
- Buy certified, shade-grown coffee because it guarantees the beans are grown in diverse, functioning forests.
- Keep domestic cats indoors. Although it's a touchy issue, Weidensaul noted cats kill more birds than any other human-related cause.

At the end, Weidensaul reminded us that "for better or for worse, for good or ill, birds' fate is in our hands. I hope we're up to the challenge."


"[A] gripping journey alongside the world's feathered wanderers and the people who study them. . . . This is the kind of book we've been waiting for."
—Christian Cooper, New York Times
A WORLD ON THE WING
The GLOBAL ODYSSEY of MIGRATORY BIRDS
SCOTT WEIDENSAUL
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Top to bottom: **BirdCast maps use radar to track migration, Scott Weidensaul on Zoom, *A World on the Wing* book cover**

FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

Glory, glory: DFO's March field trips went marching on

Editor's note: ***From the Field with David Suddjian*** *is an occasional column on topics of birding note by DFO's Field Trip chair. Your feedback and ideas are welcome. Contact David at dsuddjian@gmail.com.*

David Suddjian

With apologies to whoever coined the saying about March weather, DFO field trips came in like a lion and went out like . . . a whole pride of lions. March 2022 was a month to remember:

- In the third month of 2022, we scheduled 22 trips — and we actually made it out to the field for 18 of them. (The rest gave in to weather, as well as one cancellation due to leader illness.) We still averaged more than one trip every 2 days. Think about that: So many successful trips in March, traditionally Denver's snowiest month.

- Continuing the numbers theme, DFO outings ventured to 22 Colorado counties in March 2022, including the club's first visits to three counties in the San Luis Valley. Those came during a three-day excursion timed to enjoy the valley's thousands of Sandhill Cranes, stopping over in and around Monte Vista on their annual migration north.

- By month's end, DFO field trips had recorded 170 bird species just one quarter into 2022. That's four ahead of the pace set in March 2018, when our trip offerings were ramped up for DFO's record-setting Big Year effort.

- Field trip madness enough? Like the March Hare, DFO took another leap forward in the evolution of field trip registration. Now, participants can view and plan for outings two full months ahead, then register on the day each trip arrives at its sign-up day, three weeks before the outing date.

- Also In March, DFO partnered with Colorado Field Ornithologists for a "chase trip" to find a very rare **Slaty-backed Gull** in Larimer County. The trip succeeded, and the Slaty-backed became state bird No. 400 for DFO in Colorado.

- In March (and late February), DFO offered six different owling trips, during which 34 of the participants added the **Saw-whet Owl** as a life-list bird.

- But wait, there's more? On March 12, we conducted leader certification of three new DFO field trip leaders: **Jason Bidgood**, **Charlie Chase**, and **Norm Lewis**.

- Lastly, the club held our first gathering of field trip leaders since November 2019. The March 26 Zoom meeting, dubbed the "Spring Leaders Connection," drew 18 active leaders and three others to discuss improving our best-in-the-land program of free field trips and refining the club's best practices for trip leaders.

A highlight of the of that meeting was DFO's web guru, **Ann Johnson**. She is the Iowa-based consultant who redesigned the DFO webpage and created our great online registration system for field trips. Our leaders have such an easy time creating and managing their trips because of Ann's hand in the website's behind-the-scenes workings. Time and again, as DFO goes and grows, Ann has helped improve our service and presentation with her smart solutions

DFO's evolution in field trip management includes mundane but important details like reimbursement of carpool drivers on out-of-town trips. As fuel and other travel costs rise, our volunteer drivers make a gift of themselves on longer-distance outings. Besides their physical effort and attention to safety on the road, they bear the cost vehicle wear and tear. These trips can range for hundreds of miles, some of it over unpaved roads and dirt tracks. Our drivers deserve reimbursement from each rider. So, effective immediately,

Continued on page 19

FROM THE FIELD *cont from page 18*

DFO is increasing the recommended reimbursement rate to 50 cents per mile, a total divided equally among each car's riders. This is well above our previous 30-cent rate (and close to the current IRS reimbursement rate used for income tax deduction purposes).

This is only a recommendation, however. Drivers and riders are free to agree together on their own terms — or even no terms. Some generous drivers are known to refuse any reimbursement, saying they'd have driven to and from a trip destination either way.

But no DFO carpool driver "makes cash" on trips. So, be ready to pay your fair share whenever you ride in a field trip carpool. Don't forget to say thanks, as we do now: Thank you to all our DFO field trip carpool drivers!

Welcome to new DFO members

Michael Ames of Littleton; Ramesh and Suzanne Bhatt, Boulder; Timothy Condon, Pine; David and Karen Coupland, Longmont; Chase Crowson and Christian Duncan, Denver; Peggy Fitzgerald, Morrison; Jane Haddock, Lakewood; Dana Hiatt, Loveland; Charles and Michelle Kerr, Denver; Ann Larson, Snowmass Village; Robyn Mayer, Denver; Gloria McVeigh; Jason Mehl, Lakewood; Debra Palenik, Denver; Emma Riley; Nathan Schneider, Golden; Catherine and Craig Smith, Littleton; Fred and Jean Starr, Brighton; Karen, Kathleen, Megan and Mike Sullivan, Golden; and Hosanna Nelson and Evan Wilder, Littleton

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Jane Haddock; and Linda Purcell and Billy A. Harris Jr.

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch
Janet Peters, in memory of Charles Henry Grenier Jr.

DFO field trippers at Horse Creek Reservoir, Bent County
David Suddjian

COMMUNITY SCIENCE

Raptors on aerial march mean busy first month for Dino Ridge Hawk Watch

Patrick O'Driscoll

The first month of DFO's new and improved Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch community science project is now in the books — and the March results read like a bestseller.

Under the eagle eye of official counter and raptor biologist **Emma Riley**, a rotating crew of DFO volunteers tallied 650 migrating raptors during 2022's first 31 days of observation from the Dakota Hogback viewpoint in Jefferson County. The overall count was more than double last year's tally for the first month. The birds ranged across 15 species of hawks, eagles, falcons and vultures on a list of 20 it may encounter in the 10-week Hawk Watch season (through May 7). Remarkably, only 13 of the hundreds of individual birds spotted so far couldn't be definitively ID'ed.

"Thanks to the support of DFO and our other partners in Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch, we have more volunteers with eyes on the skies, and we have a full-time official counter," said team member **Janet Peters**. "Raptor counts this season so far are multiples above recent years."

As in prior years, America's most common bird of prey, the Red-tailed Hawk, was also the most common species sighted, accounting for nearly two-thirds of the birds tallied (411 out of 650, or about 63 percent). But several other species posted surprising gains. The biggest increases were Ferruginous Hawk, with seven times the number counted in 2021, and Golden Eagle with five times the number.

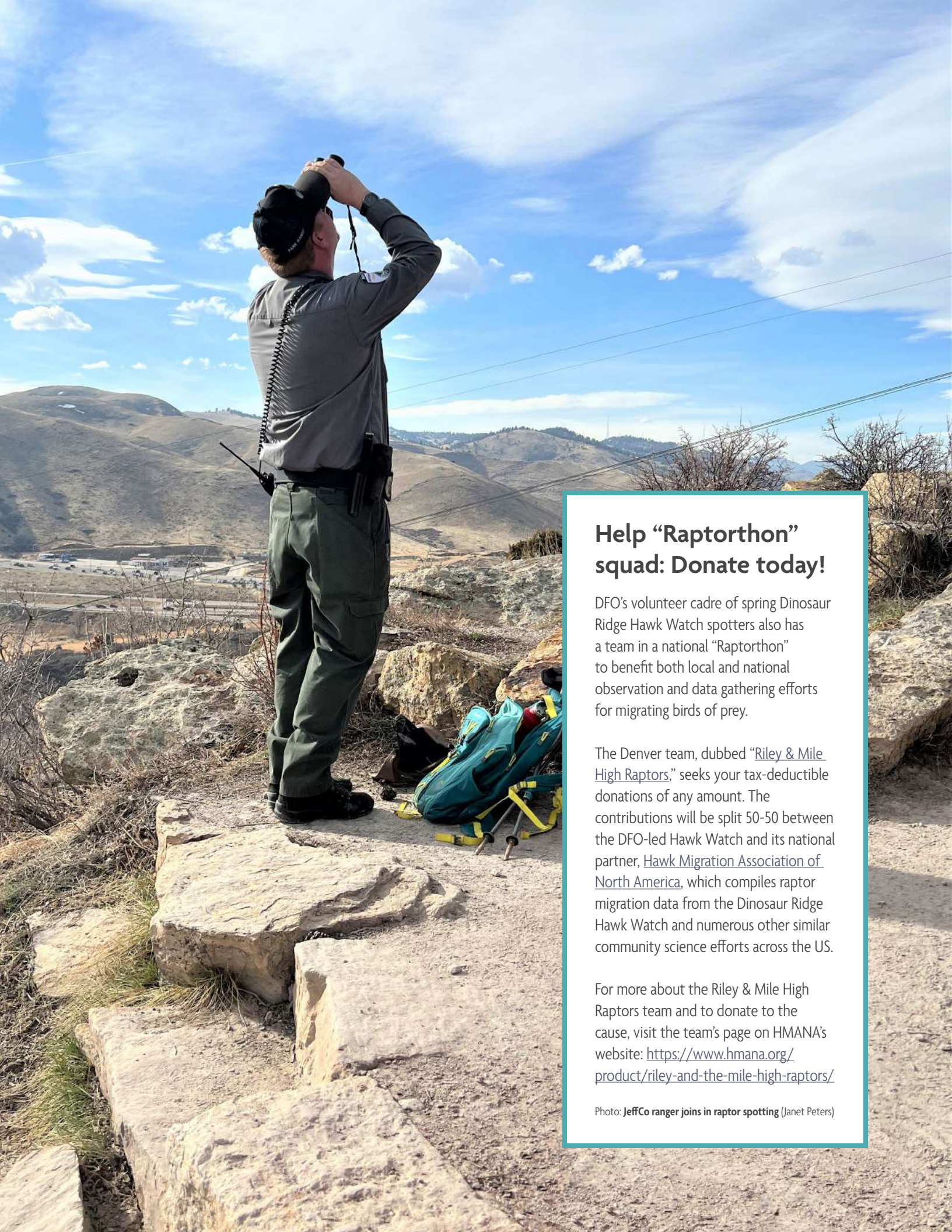
In addition, American Kestrel registered a huge increase over last year: 32 birds this March vs. only two in March 2021. Spotters also counted three Rough-legged Hawks, a rarity on Dinosaur Ridge.

"We're looking forward to the Turkey Vultures and Ospreys showing up in greater numbers," Peters said, noting that Broad-winged Hawks also are expected and accipiter and falcon numbers are expected to increase. In addition, Hawk Watch observers have noted non-raptor bird species of interest, including Mountain Bluebird, Western Bluebird, White-throated Swift, and Sandhill Crane.

"We've had a significant improvement in volunteer participation," Peters said, and many of the volunteers have had previous Hawk Watch experience elsewhere. She said counters this season have tallied raptors from Quaker Ridge, CT and Cape May, NJ, to Hook Mountain and Mount Peter, both in NY. **Jeff Birek**, who counted previously at Dinosaur Ridge when Bird Conservancy of the Rockies was in charge, also has been helping. Experienced watchers also have brought their spotting scopes, helping to nail down IDs on birds high and far from the ridge.

Peters added that even a Jefferson County park ranger, who arrived one day with orange cones to reroute mountain bikers away from the observation area, stayed around to watch "because the Golden Eagles were putting on a show."

Volunteers of all abilities are welcome to join the effort for the final weeks of this season, "with our greatest need on Saturdays and Sundays," Peters said. If you're interested, visit the Hawk Watch page on the DFO website for information and to sign up, at https://dfobirds.org/Birds/Hawkwatch.aspx.



Help "Raptorthon" squad: Donate today!

DFO's volunteer cadre of spring Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch spotters also has a team in a national "Raptorthon" to benefit both local and national observation and data gathering efforts for migrating birds of prey.

The Denver team, dubbed "Riley & Mile High Raptors," seeks your tax-deductible donations of any amount. The contributions will be split 50-50 between the DFO-led Hawk Watch and its national partner, Hawk Migration Association of North America, which compiles raptor migration data from the Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch and numerous other similar community science efforts across the US.

For more about the Riley & Mile High Raptors team and to donate to the cause, visit the team's page on HMANA's website: https://www.hmana.org/product/riley-and-the-mile-high-raptors/

Photo: **JeffCo ranger joins in raptor spotting** (Janet Peters)

PARKS NEWS

"Motor Voter," meet motor park-goer: Automatic state parks pass coming in 2023

Roger Koester

Remember when the Colorado Legislature passed the "motor voter" law that automatically registers citizens to vote when they renew their driver's licenses? Get ready for what we might call "motor park-goer."

Beginning in 2023, a new state law will automatically issue your annual Colorado state parks pass whenever you register or renew your motor vehicle registration. And it will cost less than half of what you pay now for year-round admission to more than 40 state outdoor recreation sites popular with birdwatchers across Colorado.

This new wrinkle in parks admission (with an option to "opt out") comes after the Legislature approved in 2021 a new version of the current annual state pass. It's called the Keep Colorado Wild Pass. When it goes into effect Jan. 1, 2023, it will cost just $29 a year, compared with the current $80 annual fee ($70 for seniors).

The change is intended to increase and greatly broaden the park-going audience by encouraging Coloradans who don't normally visit their state parks to see and enjoy what they've been missing — and at much lower cost with repeat visits. In a statement on its website, Colorado Parks & Wildlife seeks to address "the challenges of rapid growth in demand for, and impacts from, outdoor recreation" by asking all Coloradans "to financially support wildlife conservation and the trails and other outdoor recreation infrastructure they desire" through the automatic charge.

Certainly, the change will be more convenient. Instead of picking up your annual pass from Parks & Wildlife in person or by mail, the new pass will be part of registration renewal for your car, motorcycle, truck or RV through the Colorado Department of Revenue. The price will be included in the registration fee, but there will be an option to opt out when registering a new vehicle or upon annual renewal. Parks & Wildlife has noted that the new pass will admit registered vehicles into all state parks and recreation areas "and other potential public lands yet to be determined."

Before voting unanimously to adopt the $29 annual fee, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission discussed the new procedure at length at its March 9 meeting. Much of the conversation was about maximizing revenue to support the parks, and what effect more visitors will have on the park-going experience and the parks themselves.

The Colorado Wild Pass legislation allows for a maximum $40 annual fee, but the staff told commissioners that various estimates show less likely participation (and more opting out) above $29 a year. At the lower rate, studies by staff and an outside consultant predict the passes will generate $30 million to $59 million a year. Bringing in at least $36 million would fund all state parks operations ($32.5 million) plus search-and-rescue and avalanche safety programs. Any revenue above that could go to acquire land for new state parks and pay for trail development and maintenance, wildlife diversity programs, and more.

With fee payments gauged by vehicle traffic, Parks & Wildlife staff have estimated that traffic through the state park entrances would increase between 18 percent and 44 percent with the more plentiful new pass. As most vehicles can hold multiple park visitors, the rise in people numbers would clearly be significant, though actual numbers aren't certain. News accounts in 2020 reported that through the first 10 months of the first pandemic year, the number of state park visitors rose almost 24 percent, to 18.3 million people, from the 2019 total of 14.8 million.

In response to concerns about crowding, commission staff and the managers of two state parks (Highline Lake and Chatfield) said the additional traffic can be managed using plans and procedures in place for almost 50 years, including periodic park closures if vehicle "load" reaches a park's capacity.

The law creating the new pass includes a provision to reduce the $29 fee for low-income Coloradans. The commission did not address how that will be determined. But given that the passes will be administered through the Department of Revenue, some designation based on state income tax appears possible.

Also not addressed was the question about how to treat park-goers whose current annual parks passes might expire in 2023 before their vehicles come up for registration renewal the same year. For example, if your annual pass expires next February but your car registration doesn't renew until August, that's a six-month gap with no suggested alternative beyond paying the daily $9 fee every time you visit or taking a half-year break from going to state parks. (One-day park entry fees will remain in place for out-of-state tourists as well as Coloradans who opt not to have the new pass.)

Finally, it is not yet known how all this will be presented to an unknowing public at vehicle registration time in 2023. The simple postcard informing vehicle owners that it's time to renew might need robust enhancement in size and message to inform Coloradans about this new way of funding their state parks and gaining any-day, year-long entry to them.

It's that time of year . . .

Photos (clockwise)
Double-crested Cormorant pair
Greater Prairie-Chickens
Great Blue Heron
Jim Esten

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
Annual family membership (printed *The Lark Bunting*)	$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	$	_____
Total	$	_____

Name(s) _____

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Englewood, CO 80111-5660

THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 58 | ISSUE 06 | JUNE 2022

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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Pond-hopping for shorebirds across southeast Colorado

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH »

Common Yellowthroat

Dave Prentice

Denver Audubon Nature Center

Common Yellowthroat: The return of *witch-ity witch-ity witch-ity*

Show of hands: Have you ever encountered an *Uncommon* Yellowthroat? But seriously, if this boisterous-yet-shy warbler's sleek and stylish outfit is merely "common," what does that say about the eight other yellowthroats that share the rest of the Americas?

Oh sure, central Mexico's Black-polled Yellowthroat cuts a striking figure, but North America's Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) is at least as dandy as the Hooded Yellowthroat of Mexico's Sierra Madre. And I'd rate the male's sharp black mask at least as distinctive as that of South America's Masked Yellowthroat.

Ahh, but there's more than one common, isn't there: *Ordinary* common and *widespread* common. Of all the yellowthroats, our cover bird his month is definitely the latter. No yellowthroat is more far-flung, not even close. The Common Yellowthroat nests in practically every corner of the U.S. and Canada and is one of the most widespread warblers on the continent. Oddly, its one blank zone on the Cornell Lab's *Birds of the World* range map includes the western two-thirds of Colorado (though some other maps differ). But this time of year, the bird is everywhere else from the Front Range east.

Ours was seen and photographed by **Dave Prentice** in the wetlands of the Denver Audubon Nature Center in Chatfield State Park. That's a common (that word again) local haunt for yellowthroats. I saw one of my first there eight years ago on the monthly "Walk the Wetlands" field trip. But I've never been able to photograph one there. In fact, though I've seen them at least 50 times, I've only captured yellowthroats on camera four times *anywhere*. (Thanks, eBird database!)

That's a maddening and enduring mystery to me. Colorful males advertise themselves so brashly with their unmistakable *witch-ity witch-ity witch-ity* song — but good luck spotting them in the tangled thickets of marsh and shrubbery where they hide. Easy to ID, and at times impossible to see. I know some male Common Yellowthroats frequent open perches when singing, but recently in a birdy slough off California's Monterey Bay, I heard at least 15 in the thick undergrowth . . . and I saw not a single one.

Fun fact: *Birds of the World* tells us the Common Yellowthroat "was one of the earliest species of birds to be described from the New World." Cool. The guy who did it, by the way, was the "father of modern taxonomy" himself, the Swedish botanist/zoologist **Carl Linnaeus**, who saw one in Maryland in 1766.

Small for a warbler, this bird tends to skulk in and beneath the vegetation. No wonder its genus name, *Geothlypis*, is Greek for "ground finch." It also nests on or near the ground. Somehow, Brown-headed Cowbirds find and often parasitize those nests with their own eggs. To Common Yellowthroats' own detriment, some abandon the nest rather than incubate cowbird eggs with their own.

Science is mixed about the state of the species, which is vulnerable to wetland habitat loss and the effects of climate change. Breeding bird survey data suggest relative stability, but others have noted a small and slow annual decline.

Although differences among the nine yellowthroat species are sometimes subtle, there are at least 13 Common Yellowthroat subspecies, including a couple of "sedentary" populations that stay put year-round in the San Francisco Bay Area and the lower Rio Grande Valley. Not surprisingly, both have been in severe decline.

So keep on listening for that *witch-ity witch-ity witch-ity.* These days, it's not a bad thing if your Common Yellowthroats are still heard but not always seen.

— Patrick O'Driscoll

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Ornithology = science . . . and DFO LOVES to support avian research

Susan Blansett

Thank you, DFO members! To all of you who have contributed to our club's Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund — whether you have donated 2 bucks or 20, $200 or $2,000 — Thank you!

Our monthly program on April 25 (the last of the spring season) featured three of our 2021 grant recipients. It was impressive as heck (to me, anyway). Did you catch their fine Zoom presentations? I hope you'll read **Marc Strong**'s review of that evening program elsewhere in this issue of *The Lark Bunting*, and you can also go watch the recording in the DFO Past Programs archive (https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx).

These grantee guest presenters touched me in unexpected ways. I felt distress for the Great Blue Herons of Gunnison County's Slate River at **Patrick Magee**'s account of nesting birds disturbed by paddleboarders below. I was amazed by **William Anderson**'s genome analysis of hybridization and distribution of House Wrens on the Front Range. And I was awed by **Noelle Mason**'s work introducing children to birds and her study of stress in warblers based on migratory habitat fidelity.

As I listened to each of them, one more feeling emerged: Gratitude — to them, their institutions, their faculty/research supervisors, and to all of you. I do not exaggerate when I say the work these researchers do is important. Although the grants we give to each of them are rather small (from a few hundred dollars to less than a couple of thousand), we support important work. We underestimate the importance of these grants at our peril, and that of avian research generally. Every dollar counts!

Every researcher, every scientist, starts somewhere. Each is driven by curiosity, a desire to learn and to test and retest hypotheses, to count and measure, to weigh evidence and push the limits of what we know. Whether their proposed explanations are proven, disproven or inconclusive, they produce something of value. Other researchers use what they learned in their own research, perhaps to test again from new angles, or try different applications of the data. Avian research constantly proves its value to the natural sciences (biology and the like), the social sciences (anthropology), and applied science in pursuits such as engineering and medicine.

As I think about DFO's support of the sciences, I'm also reminded of the other ways our members engage in avian science. With your time, your brains and your birding skills, you too are field scientists — *field ornithologists*, as DFO's name continually reminds us. Your non-monetary scientific contribution may be participating in a Spring Bird Count, or helping DFO's Hawk Watch team count raptors atop Dinosaur Ridge, or observing nesting colonies of cormorants or herons at places like Tabor Lake in Wheat Ridge and Denver City Park. Your direct work as a field scientist lives in that eBird list you submit, or in that DFO field trip you take.

And consider the multiple meanings of that word "count." They all apply here, don't they? We count birds. We also count, i.e., we matter. And aspiring (and practicing) career scientists like Noelle, William and Patrick rely on (count on) us to help fund meaningful research in the lives and the habitat of the birds we all love.

It's hard not to get a little overwhelmed now and again by our world's assault on these creatures and *their* world — human-driven climate change, habitat loss, predation and other threats to the birds. Here's one of my coping mechanisms: The next time I'm feeling that weight, I will remember that there are many more Noelles, Williams and Patricks out there, pursuing their hypotheses, studying and learning their scientific craft, and adding to our vast body of knowledge. And that could include things that advance survival not just for the birds, but for humankind as well..

I'll end this thread with a final plug for one of DFO's enduring community science projects: The Spring Bird Count, which we have conducted annually since 1979. It's our semi-annual

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DFO birders at Rocky Mtn Arsenal
Patrick O'Driscoll

inventory (we also count in autumn) of the state of local birds in key locations around Denver. And it's coming right up — eight special field trip-based outings on **Friday, Saturday and Sunday, May 13, 14, and 15**. (See the separate article about the spring count on page 18 in this issue of *The Lark Bunting*.)

Here's my ask: We can really use your help. Some of our best destinations, including the Audubon Nature Center at Chatfield and Chatfield and Barr Lake state parks, are wide open and waiting for volunteers. It's pretty easy duty: Bird all morning and knock off by 3 p.m. with plenty of daylight to spare.

Who can't spare less than one day in the field? Who wouldn't want to contribute 8 hours for the birds to understanding better our local populations at such a critical time of year? Signing up is as easy as registering for a DFO field trip, and with no waiting list! Go to DFO's Field Trips page now (https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx) and look for the eight trips labeled "SPRING COUNT."

And then: See you in the field as spring migration deepens!

— Susan

The Lark Bunting newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists is published monthly except for joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submit original articles to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. Editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any such materials.

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DFO News Notes

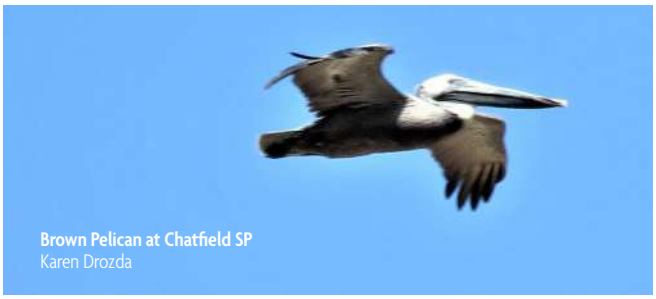
Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share them: club news, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life (and life bird!) events, and any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany. Send your items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor* ***Patrick O'Driscoll*** *at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

DFO'S NEW-LOOK LOGO IS NOW ON CLUB'S "CALLING CARD"

Denver Field Ornithologists' new multicolored-feather logo now adorns a new press run of business cards that our club's officers, board trustees, field trip leaders and other reps will carry to spread the DFO story. The new calling card includes, as before, the club's web address as well as a smartphone-readable QR Code that links to the DFO website. Next time you're on a DFO field trip, ask your trip leader if he or she has one to spare. That way you can pull yours out to share with friends or neighbors when they ask what DFO stands for or why you're always going out with your binoculars. "How many times have you been approached while birding by someone who is interested in what you are seeing?" DFO's outreach team said in an email to field trip leaders encouraging them to pick up a supply. "Getting a few cards into the hands of willing field trip participants will help more people find us."

A BROWN PELICAN, IN COLORADO? DFO'S NO. 401!

Mid-April's big chase bird around metro Denver was a rare Brown Pelican, normally not seen inland from America's coastlines. As birders pursued it between Cherry Creek and Chatfield SPs, DFO mounted a short-notice April 21 field trip combining visits to both parks in pursuit of Colorado species No. 401 on the club's eBird life list. DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** and three others started where the big seabird was first seen: "After we birded at Cherry Creek we commuted over to Chatfield, much as the Brown Pelican had several days before," Suddjian said. "We heard it was still around, and first stopped at Fox Run (Picnic Area) to try there." A few White American Pelicans were around, but no Brown. "As we were walking to the cars to try another vantage, we spotted it soaring right over us," Suddjian added. "It gained some altitude in a nice tailwind and moved off north." But not before trip participant **Karen Drozda** managed to fire off a camera shot. Welcome to DFO's club checklist, *Pelecanus occidentalis*!



Brown Pelican at Chatfield SP
Karen Drozda

HAWK WATCH'S APRIL NUMBERS AND "RAPTORTHON" RESULTS

After an outstanding March start to DFO's Hawk Watch on Dinosaur Ridge, the spring raptor-counting effort hit the heart of the season in April. More than two-thirds of the total birds of prey counted since the season's March 1 start — 1,475 out of 2,127 hawks, eagles, falcons and vultures — were seen in April. Count coordinator **Dave Hill** reported "an extraordinary day" April 16, with a single-day high of 254 migrant raptors, including 97 American Kestrels, 45 Cooper's Hawks, 32 Red-tailed Hawks and 29 Turkey Vultures. "It's been a great season thanks to our paid hawk counter, **Emma Riley**, all 42 of the wonderful volunteers who helped on the ridge this season, and the very talented committee members who have guided this effort." The season ended on May 7.

That April 16 top day was also count day for "Team Riley and the Mile-High Raptors." That was DFO's crew in a national "Raptorthon" fundraising effort among hawk-watching stations across the US in the Hawk Migration Association of North America's network of cooperators. Prized sightings included the first Broad-winged Hawk and Swainson's Hawk of the season. The day's count included 14 species of birds

Continued on page 6

of prey and 18 non-raptor species. As of early May, the team was just short of its $1,000 fundraising goal. Donations will be accepted until May 31 at https://www.hmana.org/product/riley-and-the-mile-high-raptors/.

Raptorthon crew + friends
Janet Peters

MEMBERS RE-ELECT AND ADD NEW DFO LEADERS IN APRIL VOTE

The DFO membership has re-elected **Susan Blansett** and **Sharon Tinianow** to second one-year terms as club president and vice-president, respectively. Members also elected five other club leaders in the online election that ended May 24. For the third year, voting took place via the Survey Monkey internet survey app. For the record, 117 people cast ballots, roughly 20 percent of the membership.

Newly elected as DFO treasurer is **Kathy Holland**, who was appointed on an interim basis in 2021 after then-treasurer **Sue Summers** became chair of DFO's Membership Committee. Summers and three others were elected to three-year terms on the DFO Board: **David Suddjian**, who joined as an interim appointment in 2021 after becoming DFO Field Trip chair; **Mary Geder**, a former DFO treasurer; and **Tina Jones**, twice a former board member. The office of DFO Secretary remains unfilled. If you are interested in volunteering for this essential (but not time-consuming) position on the club's Executive Committee, go to the Volunteer page of the DFO website (https://dfobirds.org/) and let us know. We'll fill you in on the details.

WHAT'S UP WITH THE AVIAN FLU? AN UPDATE

Five months into the outbreak of a deadly (to birds) new strain of avian flu, Colorado has reported mortality among some species of wild birds. The COBirds email list-serv also has carried scattered reports of American White Pelican deaths in some parks and reservoirs. First detected last December, the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza strain (HPAI) has spread to more than 30 states and all of Canada. Nationally, the USDA reports more than 750 wild bird deaths among 40-some species. A U.S. Geological Survey map published in April showed hundreds of wild and domestic instances across the eastern two-thirds of the US but only about two dozen cases in the West. Colorado, one of five western states, had seven instances, four of them in wild birds on the eastern Plains and three on the Western Slope, with one case of commercial poultry and two of non-commercial "backyard flock" poultry. (Interesting footnote: That commercial case resulted in the first U.S. case of human infection. A state prison inmate in Delta County contracted bird flu while culling poultry as part of a pre-release work program.)

Recommendations about home bird feeders have been mixed, but there's been no clear evidence that typical yard birds are affected. "Most common songbirds or other birds found in the yard, like cardinals, robins, sparrows, blue jays, crows or pigeons, do not usually carry bird flu viruses that are dangerous to poultry or people," the Centers for Disease Control reports. Authorities remind those who feed birds at home that it's always a good idea to keep feeders clean to prevent spread of any bird diseases.

BIOBLITZ COMING TO BARR LAKE ON JUNE 4

Barr Lake State Park, long a popular destination for DFO members and field trips, will be the scene of a day-long "BioBlitz" on Saturday, June 4. Popularized over the past 25 years, BioBlitzes bring communities together to find and ID as many birds, plants, insects, reptiles, mammals and other organisms as possible in a single day in a park, open space or other outdoor site. Scientists, naturalists, students, birders and many others pore over the designated location to boost its biodiversity data. The intensive focus becomes a great learning experience and connection with other nature lovers. At Barr Lake, some groups will focus closely on birds, plants and other specific organisms. "Base Camp" will be the park's Nature Center. For more details and to sign up, visit the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' BioBlitz webpage at https://birdconservancy.doubleknot.com/registration/calendardetail.aspx?activitykey=2904841&orgkey=4525&ReturnURL=//birdconservancy.doubleknot.com/app/calendar/month/4525/2022-06-01/4525/0/.

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NEWS NOTES *cont from page 6*

DÉJÀ VU: IS IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER STILL OUT ON THE BAYOU?

A team of researchers from eight states has pre-published a new study with what they believe is evidence that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is not yet extinct. The 38-page report, "Multiple lines of evidence indicate survival of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Louisiana," suggests the species may still be alive in the swamps of this state. The report was posted in early April on bioRxiv (pronounced *BIO-ARchive*), a free service that calls itself "The Preprint Server for Biology." (The document is not yet peer-reviewed.) It comes on the heels of last winter's public hearing and comment period (ended Feb. 10) on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's September 2021 proposal to declare the species extinct, once and for all. A declaration decision is due in September 2022.

Huge and camera-shy, the woodpecker was "there" — and then wasn't — several times in the first decade of the 21st century. Reported sightings, sometimes with grainy photos or blurry video, sparked excitement and short-lived bursts of tourism promotion in Arkansas and other places where remnant survivors were thought to hide. Skeptics dismissed them as mistaken IDs of Pileated Woodpecker, a slightly smaller lookalike. Virtually wiped out of its original 13-state range by decades of aggressive old-growth logging, the Ivory-billed has been an enigmatic ghost for a century. The last definitive sighting was in 1944.

The 10-member team of researchers did field work with audio recorders, trail cameras and drone video over a decade ending in 2021. Their report is at: https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2022.04.06.487399v1.full.pdf

Ivory-billed Woodpecker on a ballcap
Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO birders at Cherry Creek SP
Patrick O'Driscoll

CORRECTION

In the May 2022 issue of *The Lark Bunting*, an editing error misstated the name of the university in Gunnison where researchers are studying a high-country nesting colony of Great Blue Herons. It is Western Colorado University.

Welcome to new DFO members

Keith Bellingham and Patty Belliny of Colorado Springs; David and Mariane Erickson, Golden; Frank and Mary Jermance, Denver; Kathy Kalish, Commerce City; Kathryn Kay, Denver; Jocelyn Mertens, Centennial; John and Sydney Oberle, Fort Collins; Kirsten Ruppel, Evans; Andrew Vartabedian, Denver; Roxanne Warner, Denver, and Elizabeth Wu, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Jane Haddock; and Linda Purcell and Billy A. Harris Jr.

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch
Kathy Holland, in memory of Judy Acre

Kevin Corwin with Bald Eagle
Anne Price

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:
Up close with Kevin Corwin, friend of raptors, cranes . . . and bluebirds

*Editor's note: **In the Scope** is a series of Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, and other volunteers and members who participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email* The Lark Bunting *at patodrisk@gmail.com*

Name:	**Kevin Corwin**
Home city:	**Centennial ("but Dorchester [Boston], MA will always be home")**
Age:	**75**
Occupation:	**Almost full-time volunteer for a dozen organizations, and retired designer/developer of large-scale financial systems for the Pentagon**

How and when I became a birder?

Since all my siblings (I was the fifth of six) are bird-watchers, I guess we have to blame my mother. She was born and raised in a factory city (Brockton, MA, "Shoe Capital of the World") where there were no birds to speak of. But when my folks started taking a cold-water cabin in summer on Cape Cod in the late 1950s, and we kids all saw the quiet joy and peace she got from watching the birds of the cape sand, sea and scrub — well, I guess it just rubbed off on all of us. After we had grown and left our natal territory, I became the most-involved in birding stuff. But we all had feeders in our yards and knew the birds of our neighborhoods.

When and why I joined DFO?

I joined DFO in 1998, shortly after I retired, to learn from the birders I'd seen and admired on field trips and in other venues. They all have taught me well. My interest in birding didn't manifest itself until I was grown, and I never had time to "go birding" while I worked. When I had free time back then, I went "railroadin'," which was a big part of my life long before the birdies. I started volunteering at the Colorado Railroad Museum in 1978.

First DFO trip I went on?

I cannot remember the first trip I went on, but if I had to hazard a guess it was probably at the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt in the late 1990s or early 2000s.

How/why I became a trip leader?

I was encouraged to become a trip leader by **Chuck Hundertmark**, who convinced me that I didn't have to be the most expert person on the trip.

Continued on page 9

Corwin with Snowy Owl
Anne Price

First field trip I led?

I'm going to guess that the first trip I led was at the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. First time I ever saw a Bobolink was on a later trip I led there.

My birding focus when not on or leading a DFO trip?

My primary focus, since long before I retired, has been my weekly volunteer work for the Raptor Education Foundation. There is nothing like being nose-to-beak with a Golden Eagle on your fist to let you know you have a soul.

I also love working the Monte Vista Crane Festival every year. When a flock of a few thousand cranes takes to the air with their magical voices, it takes me back to the Pleistocene. During the summer my work administering the Colorado Bluebird Project, plus monitoring a line of nest boxes near Larkspur, occupies a lot of my time. I love doing the small festivals around the state, too. You can count on seeing me at the Karval Mountain Plover Festival in spring, the High Plains (Lamar) Snow Goose Festival in winter, the Yampa Valley Crane Festival in fall, etc.

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Favorite DFO field trip destination and why?

My favorite place to lead DFO trips is Denver's historic Riverside Cemetery. It is a magical place, literally full of the people who created Denver and Colorado. One of my personal heroes, **Silas Soule** — who stood his men down at the Sand Creek Massacre and later testified about the atrocities that Chivington's men wrought on the women and children that black day — is interred there. I always pay my respects to him, and my birding group has the opportunity to learn a little history along the way.

As for Riverside's birds, most are the "usual suspects." But the cemetery's proximity to some wetlands and the South Platte River can result in surprises from time to time. Wild Turkeys, herons, a variety of waterfowl, a migrating flock of bluebirds — we just never really know who will join us. On one trip we were privileged to observe a Black-billed Magpie "funeral." A tidings of magpies jabbered and poked and danced around the near-lifeless torso of one of theirs. As he lay on his back in his death throes, his deathbed was some long-departed human's grave. What better setting for a soul to join all the dear departed?

Best DFO field trip ever?

My first multiday trip was also my first under the leadership of **David Suddjian**. The goal of that three-day trip this past March was to create DFO trip records for three San Luis Valley counties (Conejos, Alamosa, and Costilla) that the club had never visited before. Since it dovetailed into the crane festival, I decided to see what it was like to bird with David. All I can say is: Wow! A great leader, great teammates, and I got into some nooks and crannies of the valley that I'd never seen before.

My field trip philosophy?

Let the team define the trip. Add tidbits when and where appropriate. Try to keep the sheep from straying.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

Wherever Birds-of-Paradise are found, meaning New Guinea, northwestern Australia, and nearby islands. Shape-Shifters of the bird world!

My birding patch and how it became that?

My little townhouse yard in west Centennial. It's close, it's easy, and I've seen some unusual birds there. My list of yardbirds seen for the Cornell Lab's FeederWatch program has about 30 species, including irregulars like Lincoln's, American Tree and Chipping sparrows, Cedar Waxwing, Brown Creeper, Spotted Towhee, and more. And I fondly remember the flock of Red Crossbills that showed up one day. Other favorites are the melanistic and leucistic birds that drop in from time to time.

The next trip I'm leading?

Leading trips has faded from my repertoire the past few years. Access to Riverside Cemetery was impeded for several years by RTD light rail construction; COVID set us all back a notch; and my inability to say "no" when a new volunteering opportunity comes along have all conspired to keep me off the current leader list. But that 3-day trip to the San Luis Valley earlier this year might have been the boost I needed to get back in the saddle. We'll see . . . .

Anything else?

I've talked a bit about who and what I am. What I am *not* is a lister or a chaser. Neither of those aspects of bird watching has ever appealed to me. Something else I *am* is an amateur genealogist. To date, I have tracked down over 6,200 relatives, including more than 200 direct ancestors.

APRIL PROGRAM REVIEW

Bird fitness, genetic and environmental, weaves through research grantees' talks

Marc Strong

The genetics of small Colorado songbirds and the resilience of a Western Slope colony of tall herons were the subjects of DFO's final spring program April 25 before the club's customary recess for spring migration and the summer months.

In widely ranging presentations to a Zoom audience of about 80, three Colorado researchers who received Denver Field Ornithologists grants last year shared some of what their work found. Two grantees presented genetics research and the third focused on nesting behavior — but avian fitness was a common denominator for all.

The presentation fulfilled a requirement for recipients of grants from the DFO Research, Education and Conservation Fund to report back about how their DFO-supported work has gone. Grantees also have the option to write about their research in *The Lark Bunting* newsletter or lead a DFO field trip that incorporates their project subjects and locations.

Leading off the evening was **Noelle Mason**, an undergraduate student in **Dr. Kristen Ruegg**'s lab at Colorado State University. Mason's focus on a key feature of birds' chromosomes introduced most of the DFO audience to the term "telomere." She described telomeres as protective caps on the ends of chromosomes, something like "the little plastic bit on the end of a shoelace that protects the laces from unraveling." These chromosomal caps shorten each time that cells divide, but they can shorten even more because of stress, making telomere length "a proxy for relative fitness" of species, birds included.

View the complete video of *From House Wrens to Herons: Updates from DFO-funded Avian Research* in DFO's "Past Programs" archive: https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx

Mason began her research with House Finches, extracting DNA from blood or feathers in hopes of comparing telomere length from both sources. She hypothesized that feathers would be a "window in time" of telomere length because cells in molted feathers no longer divide. But that would have required recapturing the same bird multiple times, which proved more difficult than expected.

So she shifted gears to niche tracking and niche switching, the seasonal movement between similar or different habitats in another species, the Yellow Warbler. Niche trackers stay in the same type of habitat, e.g., Yellows that summer in the dry U.S. West also winter in dry parts in South America. But niche-switching warblers might summer in the dry West and winter in wet Costa Rican rain forests. Mason's hypothesis this time was that switchers would experience more stress than trackers, and therefore would have shorter telomeres.

Unfortunately, the genetic PCR testing method Mason planned to use became a victim of the rampant supply-chain problem affecting everyone everywhere today. She still awaits delivery of "primers" (DNA fragments used in lab tests) needed to run her analysis. The results can shed light on bird adaptive capacity and allow scientists to use genomic science to study climate change, certainly a source of stress on bird fitness. Fingers crossed here that Mason gets those primers soon and gives us a future update.

Up next was **William Anderson**, an undergraduate in the Taylor lab at CU Boulder, whose research concerned two North American subspecies of House Wrens that overlap here along the Front Range. He aimed to define what geographic boundary exists between the two and determine how much they have hybridized. Although indistinguishable to most eyes, the subspecies' DNA differs by about 5 percent — the same degree as between Black-capped Chickadees and Carolina Chickadees,

After obtaining House Wren blood samples from California to the East Coast, Anderson analyzed genetic component structure to determine that both subspecies are present in Colorado. Then he used hybrid analysis to determine how much of each subspecies was present in individual birds' genotypes. He found that Colorado has three kinds — pure eastern, pure western and hybrid — and that the Front Range is the boundary. Interestingly, he also found that pure subspecies populations at this geographic interface show that hybrids display some negative effect on fitness.

Anderson had first hypothesized that elevation played a role in hybridization, with western birds capable of coming down from the mountains, but eastern birds not capable of climbing into them. But his research suggested that wasn't true. At the

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Photos left to right: **Noelle Mason with goldfinch**, **William Anderson with owl** (The Taylor Lab), **Patrick Magee** (WCU)

project's highest site (8,300 feet), a House Wren was 58 percent eastern subspecies. Anderson suggested that habitat partitioning may explain this surprising result. On the plains, House Wrens mostly inhabit riparian corridors. Those in the mountains came from nesting boxes along creeks, so results may be skewed to include more hybrids.

Up last, with observational rather than genetic research, was **Patrick Magee** of Western Colorado University in Gunnison. An associate professor of wildlife and conservation biology, Magee described his students' ongoing research into the fitness of a high-country breeding colony of Great Blue Herons. He said the heronry faces the threat of disruption by more people recreating in the Slate River, which flows beneath the tall grove where the herons nest.

The Slate River Working Group, a Crested Butte effort to accommodate both herons and river boaters, sought to know the effect of increased traffic so it could make informed land management plans. Although river recreation accounts for less than 1 percent of human activities on the river, "the river goes directly under the nests," Magee noted, "so there is no spatial separation between human activity and the nesting parents."

Key elements to successful heron nesting include easy access to foraging areas, the right kinds of trees, and isolation from disturbances, "whether from predators or human activity." Although not considered a high priority conservation species, Great Blue Herons "put all their eggs in one basket" by nesting together, Magee said. Disruption of one colony can affect many herons.

His student researchers observed disturbance behaviors — flushing from or hunkering down in nests, as well as alertness behavior. They saw no such reactions before boaters and floaters arrived beneath the colony or after they left. Depending on the year, this colony stress behavior occurred 47 to 81 percent of the time.

Researchers saw active nest numbers decline by one third, from 25 nests in 2018 to 16 in 2021. Although the colony's reproductive success remains high, other research has shown that once a colony drops below 20 nests, it does not persist as long as larger colonies.

At the moment, Magee said, Slate River boaters are asked to observe a voluntary "no-float" period during the herons' March 15-July 15 early breeding season. As a compromise, there are no river restrictions after July 15, though half the nests are still active at that point.

Magee said collaboration between river users and wildlife conservationists toward a shared vision is difficult. Cutting off river access is fraught with legal and water rights challenges. And yet, a vulnerable natural resource is worth protecting.

During audience Q&A, Magee said high numbers of chicks still fledge each year, even though the number of active heron nests is decreasing. But juveniles may be in poorer physical condition and less fit because adults can't forage successfully for food with human disturbance below. One supposition is that fewer juveniles surviving the winter could account for fewer birds returning and fewer active nests. That hypothesis would need to be studied — and perhaps will in a future stage of Western Colorado University's ongoing research at Slate River.

Many thanks to all three grantees for sharing with the DFO audience such compelling information about their findings. Reporting back to supporters like DFO furthers everyone's knowledge of birds and their habitat — and raises yet more questions worthy of future research.

FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

Bombs away! Quick ID sessions on Zoom will tune you up for spring migration

David Suddjian

The first "Bird Bomb" exploded on April 28. I'm happy to report that everyone came out alive — and there were even smiles on our faces.

In case you haven't heard, ***Bird Bombs: Helpful Bursts of ID Info***, is DFO's new Zoom-based series of concise (30 minutes) blasts of field ID know-how via live Zoom-based webinar. Each episode (all are free) will be seasonally appropriate, helping DFO members experience the bird year as it evolves, migration to migration and beyond.

Bird Bombs sessions will feature PowerPoint presentations with useful, quality images of the birds we aim to see (and hear), season to season. Colorado is our principal context, with the sharpest focus on the Front Range and greater Denver region. Each session includes a lesson on ID, an entertaining bird photo quiz, and Q&A to wrap up. Contributing photographers, most of them DFO members, will share their best bird images for a rich visual experience. And afterwards, Zoom recordings of each session will be archived on the "Past Programs" page of the DFO website.

I led the inaugural *Bird Bombs* webinar on Zoom on April 28, with *Spring Into Warblers*, a look at the most common migrant warblers we see here each spring. Although we organized it on short notice with migration looming, the session generated a ton of interest: More than 170 people registered! I discussed warbler ID and local distribution and reviewed what field marks to look for with warblers. Then we took a closer look at seven warblers that commonly breed in Colorado (thank you, DFO photographers, for your warbler photos).

It felt rather like leading a DFO field trip. It was great fun talking and teaching about our warblers, as I do when we encounter one (or anticipate finding one near) in the field. I think everyone who attended had the opportunity to learn something new and useful. Rather than take my word for it, here are impressions from several participants:

"I enjoyed the beautiful warbler pics, lively presentation on ID tips and habitat distribution, and helpful ID info."

"A fun and informative deviation from your typical bird id webinar."

"I enjoyed Bird Bombs! It helped me ID some of the warblers that are found in CO, really well done. Looking forward to the next Bird Bombs presentation!"

"I appreciated how focused this presentation was to the Denver area and how timely it was. This is information that I can use right now. I learned something new about eBird. I didn't realize that distribution graphs could be produced so easily for specific species."

"All the pictures and notes in the presentation were done really nice. Good quality photography."

"David shared lots of specific knowledge that was especially helpful to Colorado birders."

"Amazing bomb of information!"

Ready to get Bird Bombed again? Our next free lesson, ***Bird Bombs: Kings of the Road***, is set for **May 19, 7 p.m. MDT**. Kingbirds are just returning, and there will be other fun birds that flush, flit and fly along with them this summer, out along Colorado's highways and byways. Register now! Here's the link: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_8BFjwPxdQRC521szvcDPmQ

The success of *Bird Bombs* depends in large part on generous contributions of images from the photographers who are our most valued cooperators. Can you share your images as

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FROM THE FIELD *cont from page 13*

a *Bird Bombs* contributor? If so, please contact me at dsuddjian@gmail.com. High quality pictures of birds are needed, but other images are vital, too — more distant views, shots in less than good lighting or that may have part of the bird obscured. These can be great tools for discussion and help with understanding birds as we encounter them in the field.

The strong response to our first *Bird Bombs* installment tells me birders are hungry for bird ID info, especially in concise, locally flavored bursts. This DFO opportunity via Zoom format can reach so many more people, too.

I encourage you to join in this DFO outreach. Invite a friend or two to register for the next *Bird Bombs* on May 19. When you receive the email announcement, share it with them, and help your birding club grow.

Wilson's Warbler
Dale Pate

HISTORY

ADBC? Here's tae ye, Angus & Dundee, DFO's long-lost, kilted kith and kin

Patrick O'Driscoll

Last January, out of DFO's past, came an unanswered knock on the club's online door. Vice president **Sharon Tinianow** found the Nov. 24 email while cleaning up the Denver Field Ornithologists mailing list. "Here is the November Newsletter," began the message from someone named **Jon Cook**, at a United Kingdome address. "I hope you enjoy it."

Attached was a document with the handsomely rendered head of a Golden Eagle on the cover, below "ADBC" and above the words "Angus & Dundee Bird Club," from the pastoral North Sea coast region about 60 miles north of Edinburgh, Scotland.

"What to do about this friendly guy from across the pond?" Sharon asked DFO's newsletter editor by email. "Are we supposed to reciprocate by mailing ours to him?" Tinianow's question went missed and unanswered until another email knock came in mid-March: Same sender, same message, same eagle — but this time on the Scottish club's 25th anniversary newsletter. Inside, in a 3½-page historical review of Angus & Dundee's first quarter-century, was this intriguing detail:

> *In 2004 a group of 10 ADBC members was welcomed to Colorado by **Denver Field Ornithologists** under a partnership which has unfortunately since lapsed.*

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That sent us pawing through past issues of *The Lark Bunting* for clues to this all-but-forgotten connection. Soon, past DFO membership chair **Mary Cay Burger** and club historian **Kris Haglund** came to our aid. In a 20-year-old issue of the DFO newsletter was this headline:

Denver Field Ornithologists
And Dundee Scotland Bird Clubs to Twin

The April 2002 newsletter reported the DFO Board's unanimous approval to start "a twinning relationship" with the Scottish club. The arrangement would "provide educational birding experiences for their memberships in both the Rocky Mountain Region and the east coast of Scotland," the article reported.

Sue Clasen with Bob McCurley at Scottiish blind

Our first thought was: How and why did we connect — and then become disconnected? The first hint was a photo farther down in the article. It showed the Scottish club's founder and president, **Bob McCurley**, shaking hands and exchanging newsletters with **Veronica Holt**, then-editor of DFO's newsletter. The caption said the picture had been taken at Veronica's cousin's farm in Angus. After further sleuthing, we learned that Holt, who lived in Elizabeth, CO, was herself a native Scot (born in Dundee) and also a member of ADBC. Twinning the clubs was her idea.

Items from "our Scottish twin club" would appear occasionally in *The Lark Bunting* through the next decade. In one front-page brief, McCurley described his club's plan to build the first-ever "sea-watching *hide*" (Scottish for "viewing blind") on the Angus coast. Travelogues by Holt and DFO member **Marilyn Binkley** recounted their separate visits to Dundee and Angus, where McCurley led each out for life-bird looks at species like Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Yellowhammers, Corn Buntings, Common Redshanks and Long-tailed Tits.

Denver Field Ornithologists and Dundee Scotland Bird Clubs to Twin.

At their meeting on April 2nd, the DFO Board (pictured on the left) unanimously approved a proposal to form a twinning relationship with the Scottish Angus and Dundee Bird Club. Board members welcomed the opportunity to provide educational birding experiences for their memberships in both the Rocky Mountain Region and the east coast of Scotland, and to share dynamic birding information.

Lark Bunting **article from 2002**

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Welcome and Cheerio Scottish Birders!

Last month, 10 members of our twin club, the Angus and Dundee Bird Club (ADBC), spent just under a couple of weeks doing some intense birding in Colorado. This was the first visit to North America, so every bird (virtually) was a lifer. Other folks had a several target birds, which, thanks to their energy and that of members of the DFO Board and key leaders, were met!

With DFO's then-president Toni Rautus, far left, are Scottish bird club visitors to Denver in 2004 photo from DFO newsletter

The biggest splash was in summer 2004, when the clubs consummated their connection in person. McCurley and nine other Angus & Dundee members were welcomed to Colorado with a party and several days of special DFO field trips. Splashy coverage in *The Lark Bunting* included a photo of DFO's then-president, **Toni Rautus**, and McCurley signing the formal charter of the clubs' twinning.

"**Joey Kellner** led a field trip and I remember riding with someone, I think **Allison Hilf**, on the trip to Rocky Mountain National Park and Estes Park (field trip led by **Scott Rashid**)," Burger recalled. "DFO set up several days of great trips for them," including an outing into Wyoming with **Brian Wheeler**, the illustrator, photographer and author of guidebooks on raptors.

Burger also said DFO began sending a complimentary copy of *The Lark Bunting* each month (first the printed paper version, then the online link) to the Scottish club's president: "But then Bob McCurley's email bounced back about 2020."

Unbeknownst to DFO, McCurley had died in June 2019. Holt, who with McCurley had forged the bond between the clubs, had died several years earlier (also unbeknownst to DFO), just a year and a half after her 2013 retirement as newsletter editor. With the demise of these two catalysts, the clubs' relationship was fading.

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Atlantic Puffin with food for young
Susan Clasen

Razorbills on Scotland's Isle of May
Susan Clasen

Puffin nestling
Susan Clasen

The last known interaction occurred in 2015, when longtime DFO member **Sue Clasen** coincidentally booked a summer tour of Iceland, Scotland, Wales, and England. Her itinerary included a "Birding in the Highlands and Islands" trip with the Audubon Naturalist Society. When Clasen happened to tell Burger and other friends at Denver's Tuesday Birders about her coming trip, "Mary Cay mentioned she had contacts with the Dundee & Angus Bird Club."

Eager to pursue a connection, Clasen contacted McCurley, and she soon expanded her itinerary to include several days on Angus and Dundee turf. "Bob was my host for the trip and was very generous with his time, local history, bird stories and knowledge. He had always said their club wanted to reciprocate."

Did they ever. McCurley squired Sue around the region, even to the Loch Lee area and parish church where Clasen's ancestors had worshiped and, in 1808, her third-great grandparents were married. On another day, they boated to the Isle of May, a seabird colony 5 miles off the coast. "Getting off the boat we were attacked by many nesting Arctic Terns," Clasen recalled. But they also saw Northern Gannets, Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, Black-legged Kittiwake and European Shag, among many others. They also birded in Montreathmont Forest, using a blind the club had built and seeing species like Eurasian Green Woodpecker, Eurasian Jay and Coal Tit.

"Every time I was introduced," Clasen noted, "they mentioned I was a DFO member and remembered that wonderful Colorado birding group that treated them like royalty for two weeks" back in 2004.

She added that "it sure would be nice" for DFO to restore the old connection. "I fear that the individuals I birded with are probably all deceased, as they were not young chicks in 2015. I think it would behoove DFO to reactivate contact" with ADBC.

We'll try to do that, Sue. For openers, here are links to the Angus & Dundee Bird Club's website and Facebook Group pages:
http://www.angusbirding.com/html/mainpage.html
https://www.facebook.com/angusbirdwatching

In the meantime, stay tuned for updates. And until our clubs meet again, we raise a toast to our Scottish friends:

> Here's tae ye, pals and lassies of Angus & Dundee Bird Club:
> ***Lang may yer lum reek!****
>
> *("Long may your chimney smoke," meaning, "We wish you well for the future!")

SPRING BIRD COUNT

Who knew? Species trend tables bring decades of DFO Spring Bird Counts to life

Patrick O'Driscoll

With DFO's 43rd Spring Bird Count about to begin (**May 13-15**), it's not too late to sign up for one of this year's eight one-day field counts at popular birding locations around metro Denver. It's as easy as going to the "Upcoming Field Trips" page on the DFO website (https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx) and registering for any of those labeled "SPRING COUNT." All eight count trips have plenty of slots left for volunteer participants of all capabilities, from beginner to expert.

And while you're registering online, take a few more moments to check out a cool page on the website that will inform and surprise you about this annual effort. It's the Spring Bird Count database page. There you will find that all 291 species ever seen on count days have "trend" charts to track the ups and downs of the birds' numbers at count locations down through the years.

Just click https://dfobirds.org/Birds/SpringFall/SpringFallSpecies.aspx and check "SPRING" in the appropriate spot. Then you can look not only at each year's species-by-species tally, but also zero in on each species' count population trends in this, the fifth decade of recordkeeping. (Except for 1979, for unknown reasons, and 2020, when the count was canceled because of the COVID-19 outbreak.)

The completed database is the work of **Ann Johnson**, DFO's indefatigable, Iowa-based web maven and designer. "Last evening I finished getting the rest of Hugh's spring count data entered into the DFO website," Johnson emailed in April, referring to the hand-tallied checklists that longtime DFO member **Hugh Kingery**, dean of Colorado birders, kept in the earlier years of the count. "You now have an impressive set of data since 1980 for both spring and fall counts that I think can help tell a story."

The story is, Johnson said she "kind of got sucked into looking at the trends for a number of species" while noodling around the database. As examples, she attached to her email two colorful tables of the changing spring results over the years for Broad-tailed Hummingbirds and Mountain Bluebirds. Vertical, forest-green lines charted the number of the species' individuals counted each year. Slashing across those up-and-down year lines was a horizontal, teal-green line that mathematically tracked the species' overall trend through the decades. *(NOTE: See the charts Ann created for these two birds on page 19.)*

Johnson was careful to note that raw numbers alone don't tell the full story of each species' trend. "Certainly other factors such as number of participants, weather, etc. enter into a true scientific analysis of all this," she said, "but I do think it gives the lay person a snapshot of what may be happening with bird populations."

She continued: "For instance, when I look at the two charts . . . the first question that comes to mind is simply, 'Why are Broad-tailed Hummingbirds seemingly increasing while Mountain Bluebirds are on a bit of a decline when they are apparently in many of the same habitats?' If there is a question about habitat degradation, you might take a look at a couple of representative species of that habitat and see what's going on.

"Conversely, what is happening to representative species in a habitat that has had some major improvements over the years? I don't know enough about Colorado habitats to even formulate the correct questions, but a similar look at Henslow's Sparrow here in Iowa would have shown a steep decline until the CRP program was instituted," Johnson said, noting the federal Conservation Reserve Program's "great success story" creating new fallow farmland habitat for birds and other wildlife. "The raw data still give a sense of how the species counts have progressed through the years."

Historical stats aside, what's your pleasure for this year's DFO's Spring Bird Count: Barr Lake State Park? (Two separate counts on different days there.) Cherry Creek, Chatfield, or Castlewood Canyon SPs? How about a day at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, Lower Bear Creek, or the Audubon Nature Center at Chatfield?

All are now open for Spring Bird Count signups. Come join the count in the heart of Colorado's busiest migration month!

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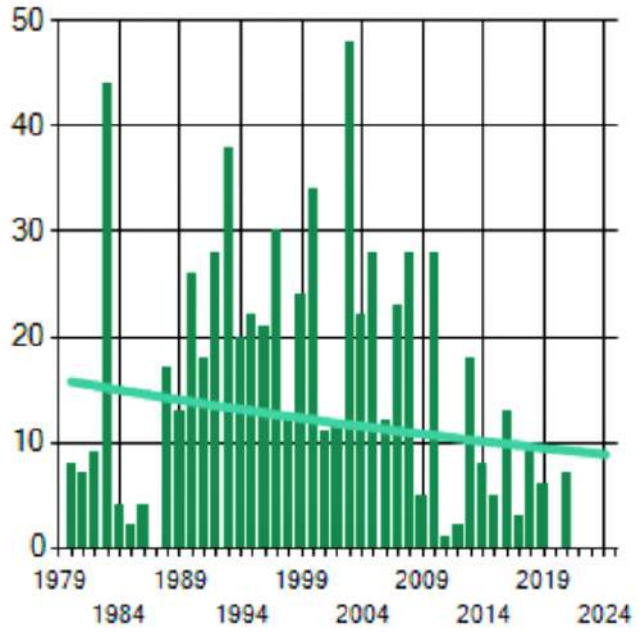
Mountain Bluebird

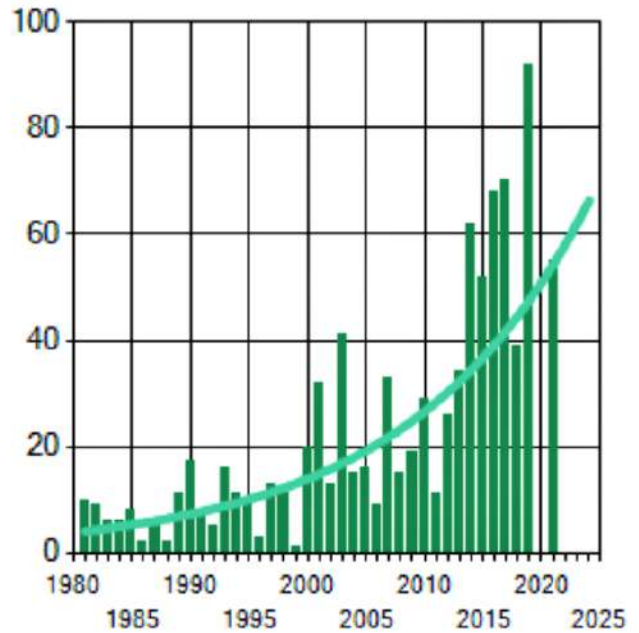


Where They Were

Count	Individuals	No. Counts
Audubon Nature Center	15	5
Castlewood Canyon State Park (Douglas County)	560	36
Chatfield State Park	47	13
Cherry Creek State Park (Arapahoe County)	2	1
Lower Bear Creek	34	5
Roxborough Road	12	7

DFO count trend for Mountain Bluebird

Broad-tailed Hummingbird



Where They Were

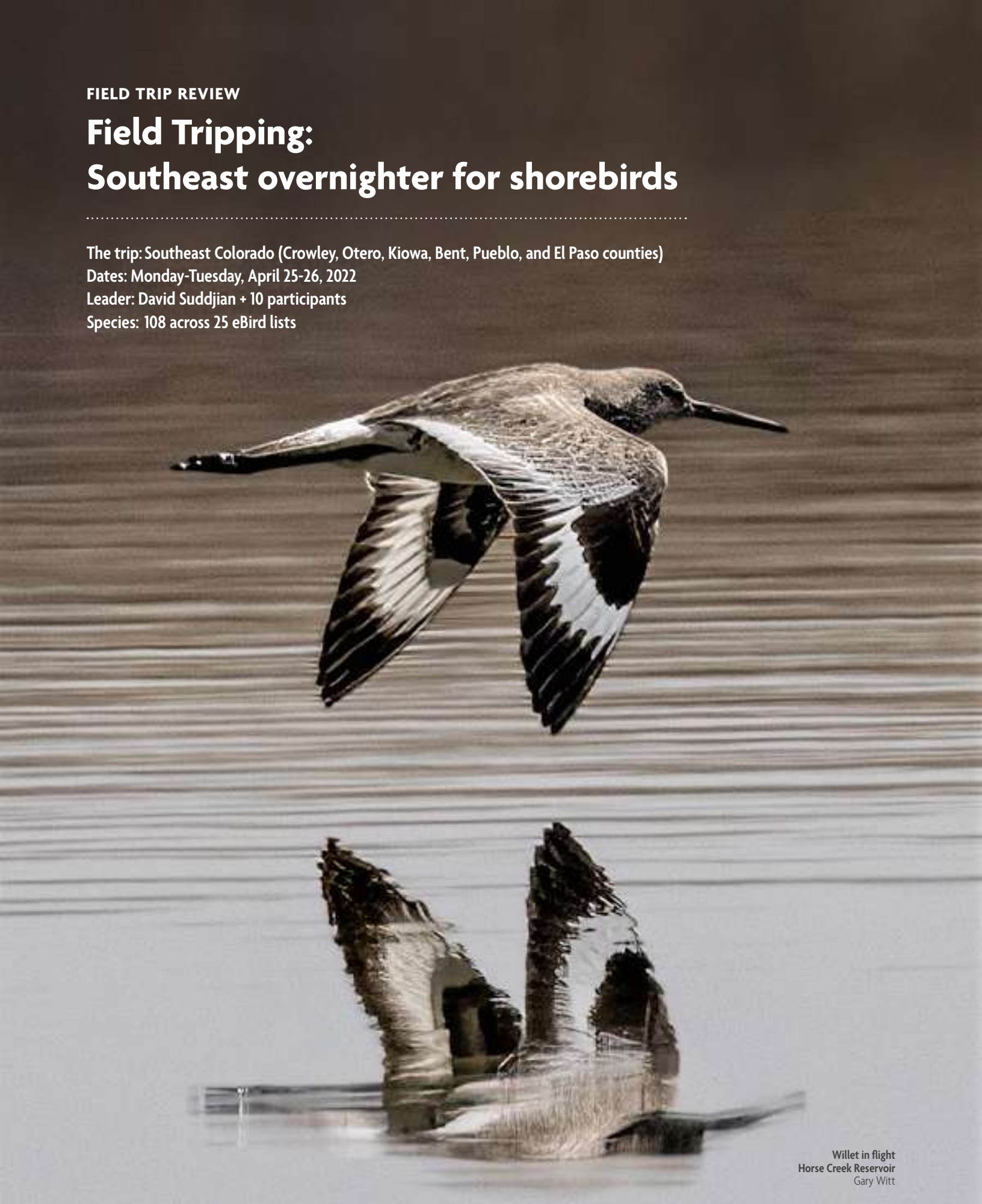
Count	Individuals	No. Counts
Audubon Nature Center	240	37
Barr Lake State Park	5	4
Castlewood Canyon State Park (Douglas County)	181	37
Chatfield State Park	289	34
Cherry Creek State Park (Arapahoe County)	70	11
Lower Bear Creek	103	17
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR	9	6
Roxborough Road	8	5

DFO count trend for Broad-tailed Hummingbird

FIELD TRIP REVIEW

Field Tripping: Southeast overnighter for shorebirds

The trip: Southeast Colorado (Crowley, Otero, Kiowa, Bent, Pueblo, and El Paso counties)
Dates: Monday-Tuesday, April 25-26, 2022
Leader: David Suddjian + 10 participants
Species: 108 across 25 eBird lists



Willet in flight
Horse Creek Reservoir
Gary Witt

This two-day trip targeted the productive shorebird habitats at the far-flung reservoirs of Colorado's southeastern counties. We timed it well for the peak of spring migration and enjoyed 20 shorebird species over both days, with Snowy Plover, Willet, Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, Western Sandpiper and more. Horse Creek, Adobe, and Upper Queens (Neeskah) reservoirs all offered splendid studies on a quiet calm day.

Shorebirds weren't the only stars. At Horse Creek Reservoir in Bent County, we were thrilled by a hunting Peregrine Falcon that plucked a duck from the sky, high overhead. The sound of the hunt was as if a jet had passed over!

We also stopped to see the rare Common Gallinule that had been at Fountain in El Paso County for more than a week, finding it easily for Colorado species No. 402 for DFO! But a displaying pair of Northern Harriers soon stole the show, with the male dancing and diving, flipping upside down, and leaving us with mouths agape at the beauty and excitement as he drew his mate to their likely nesting spot.

DFO birders, Adobe Reservoir
Gary Witt

Shorebirds, Horse Creek Reservoir
Kathy Holland

Peregrine Falcon
Diane Roberts

Snowy Plover, Horse Creek Reservoir
Gary Witt

Northern Harrier male with prey
Gary Witt

SUPPORTING DFO

Your tax break can help build DFO's nest egg

Roger Koester

If you think tax season is behind us, you're only partly right. We may file in spring, but taxes are a year-round reality in everyone's life. So there is no time like the present to put your donations to work for you, too.

Although they were suspended for a time during the COVID pandemic, required minimum withdrawals from IRAs for those over age 72 remain with us — as does the need to pay income tax on the taxable amount of that mandatory withdrawal.

That's important for charitable giving because people over 72 who take such a "Required Minimum Distribution" (RMD) can donate, tax-free, some or all of the over-and-above part of their IRA distribution directly to a qualified nonprofit. And guess which organization happens to be a qualified nonprofit? That's right: Denver Field Ornithologists.

If you qualify, you can make such donations from your IRA anytime during the year, if they meet the required minimum withdrawals from your retirement savings. This kind of donation is called a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). If you are now required to take a minimum distribution in 2022, consider this strategy to make some or all of it a QCD that exempts the donation amount from your taxable income. You don't even need to itemize your taxes to do this, either. It's a direct reduction in taxable income. You win, and so does DFO.

There is one caveat: Whatever funds you choose to contribute to charity as a QCD must be donated directly from your IRA to DFO (or to any other qualifying nonprofit). If you withdraw the funds first and then donate them, that doesn't count and won't qualify for the tax exemption.

Know this, too: Additional restrictions may apply for some individuals. For all the specifics about how to donate using this method, contact your tax or investment adviser first.

And if you do decide to donate to DFO, remember that our club has three potential designations for contributions:

- **Research, Education and Conservation Grant Fund**, which annually supports researchers and educators in bird- and conservation-related work across the state
- **DFO Hawk Watch**, which helps pay for a seasonal observer who collects data and leads a corps of volunteer spotters monitoring spring migration of birds of prey from atop Dinosaur Ridge west of Denver
- **Friends of DFO**, which supports training for field trip leaders and workshop presenters and pays honoraria to speakers for the club's monthly evening programs

For more about how to contribute to these funds, visit the donations page on the DFO website at: https://dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx.

And by the way, speaking of itemizing or not itemizing, here's one more reminder on a semi-related topic. Congress did *not* renew for 2022 a tax provision that allowed taxpayers to deduct a general charitable contribution of $300 to $600 (single vs. marred filing status) without having to itemize deductions on their tax returns. For 2023, it's back to itemize, itemize, itemize for anyone seeking to deduct charitable donations *other than* the Qualified Charitable Contributions mentioned above.

Lark Sparrow
Dave Prentice

Lincoln's Sparrow
Burke Angstrom

Green Heron
Burke Angstrom

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
Annual family membership (printed *The Lark Bunting*)	$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	$	_____
Total	$	_____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____
(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:
Kathy Holland, 351 E Caley Ave, Centennial, CO 80121-2201

THE LARK BUNTING
6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660

THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 58 | ISSUE 07–08 | JULY/AUGUST 2022 DFOBIRDS.ORG

GUEST ESSAY

At first reluctant, a birder embraces her camera

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KAREN DROZDA "IN THE SCOPE"

Up close with a tireless, ever-curious trip leader

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Down Lamar way, good times and great birds

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HAWK WATCH 2022

More watchers + more raptors = more fun

PAGE 23

PHOTO OF THE MONTH »

Summer Tanager

Rob Raker

Wheat Ridge Greenbelt

ON THE COVER

Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography and still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

Summer Tanager: Foretaste of the season

This issue's cover bird bears the name of the season — but not the reason for being here. Summer Tanagers in this half of North America nest well south of us, in those lovely riparian cottonwood corridors that are lifelines for wildlife in the arid Southwest.

Actually, we celebrate their rare and colorful presence in spring — and this year, a small flurry of them showed up around Colorado. From a yard bird in Denver's Athmar Park neighborhood to sightings along Boulder Creek, near John Martin Reservoir, beside Durango's Animas River, at Denver Botanic Gardens' Chatfield Farms and beyond, *Piranga rubra* was an unexpected delight.

Lakewood photographer **Rob Raker** found the first-year male on our July-August cover in Jefferson County's Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, where many migrants (including wayward ones) drop in. Unlike most first-spring males, this guy is not the usual blotchy patchwork of greenish-yellow and red. With muted yellow beneath dusky rose head, breast and nape, he's not yet close to the vivid, rosy red bird in your field guide.

Fun fact: The adult male Summer Tanager is the only entirely red bird on our continent. Its red cousin, the Scarlet Tanager, has a black tail and wings, and the Northern Cardinal wears a black mask and throat. Vermilion Flycatcher? Dark back and mask, too. Hepatic Tanager? Reddish-orange but dulled by almost as much gray. (Hepatic means "of the liver," a reddish-brown organ.) Like the other tanagers, the Summer female is generally greenish-yellow over all (no wing bars, thanks).

One more fun fact: Its nickname is "bee bird," for its favorite cuisine: bees, wasps, and their larvae. Like humans picking through bony fish, Summer Tanagers remove the stinger first before eating.

Although the American Bird Conservancy says populations of this species are stable, its location preferences in the West (riverine corridors of cottonwoods) subject it to the same threat of riparian habitat loss that has made Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and Yellow-billed Cuckoo scarcer there.

All the more reason for us to cheer when the Summer Tanager does show up in Colorado — a rare but welcome forerunner of the season for which it is named.

— Patrick O'Driscoll

Patrick O'Driscoll, a DFO member since 2014, is a retired newspaper journalist who took up birding in his 50s. He leads field trips and is editor of *The Lark Bunting*.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Summertime . . . and the birdin' is easy

Susan Blansett

"The snow is melting into music." **John Muir** penned these words while gazing at Denali in late spring. To me, though, the famous naturalist's words conjure migration, and the music of myriad birds, each with its unique song, that flood into and through Colorado in spring. To look at our mountain peaks in April and May is to witness the transformation of winter and spring's white bounty — snowpack accumulating, then receding, then growing again until it melts into torrents of June runoff. When I walk along Clear Creek, binoculars in hand, rippling water music blends with the songs of Yellow and Yellow-rumped warblers, chickadees, wrens and the occasional American Dipper.

It is still spring as I write this, though migration is already peaking. DFO's Hawk Watch on Dinosaur Ridge is over for the season. Nest-building here below the Front Range is nearly done. Western Tanagers are traveling through Golden on their way to nest in much higher locales.

I'm finally rested from the whirlwind that was the Colorado Field Ornithologists Convention in Pueblo. Kudos to CFO president **Nick Komar** and his volunteers for a massive (and successful) effort! Although that untimely May snowstorm affected several field trips, we were able to pivot, see a lot of great birds and score some lifers. As enjoyable as the outings themselves was the reunion with birders I've not seen in years and meeting new FOBs (Friends in Birding). I'm reminded of an old Girl Scout song lyric: "Make new friends, and keep the old. One is silver and the other's gold."

By the time you read these words, we will be in that mid-June, post-migration lull when songbirds settle, fledglings try out their wings and, for some adult birds, their second brood of nestlings is already pestering to be fed. Things are still lively, migration's frenzy is past, and birding is more contemplative (for me, at least). I'll find myself more patient and happier just to spend time watching a robin bathe, a Spotted Towhee scratch out a meal beneath my feeders, and hummingbirds sipping at the blooms of a sturdy old honeysuckle in a sheltered corner of the garden. Swainson's and Red-tailed hawks may be climbing thermals high above my backyard. Soon, American Goldfinches will start building their neat and tiny nests, timed to hatch their young when thistles and other wild foods are abundant.

As sure as these signs of approaching summer, numerous DFO field trips near and far, and a few "Bird Bomb" online ID sessions with Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** will help satisfy our yearnings for new birds, for learning new habitats and revisiting old favorites, and for community and birding fellowship. As a veritable slacker about leading field trips since April, I myself resolve to get back on the DFO trail by leading two summer outings, not to mention taking time to read one or two bird books gathering dust on my nightstand.

Don't look now: Shorebird migration will be here sooner than we expect. Then it's autumn warblers, other migrants, and immature birds of nearly every species. While learning and adding new birds to our life lists are year-round opportunities, it seems that the bulk of my birding education falls in summer and autumn, and this year, I am hungry for it.

For many of us, there will be weekenders to other parts of the state, cross-country travel or trips abroad. Even *The Lark Bunting* newsletter will take a brief vacation mid-June through July. Whether you stay or go, how about doing so with a new DFO logo shirt, car magnet or beverage mug? (*See details on page 19 of this issue*.)

Until we reconvene in late August and September, my wish for all of you is that your birding is as delightful, exciting, adventurous and safe as your expectations. As you build your life list or explore new habitats and destinations, please share your summer birding stories and pictures on DFO's Instagram and Facebook pages. And hug your friends and family close every chance you get.

See you in the field!

Susan Blansett, club president since 2021, has served in numerous volunteer roles on committees and as an officer since joining the DFO Board in 2016. This year she added field trip leader to the list.

EDITOR'S NOTE

See you in September . . .

As we do each summer, *The Lark Bunting* is taking a mid-season hiatus. This month's newsletter combines the July and August issues. We'll return in mid-August with the September issue, as DFO's autumn schedule of monthly programs begins and we all scan the skies for fall migration.

As I ask whenever we take these semi-annual breaks: What else would YOU like to see in the pages of your DFO newsletter? Tell us your suggestions. Send us your contributions, critiques and questions. Please let us know! Drop me an email at patodrisk@gmail.com or call me at 303-885-6955. I'm all ears.

Happy summer, and thank you for continuing to read *The Lark Bunting* as we bring you words about birds from DFO!

— Patrick O'Driscoll
Editor, The Lark Bunting

Welcome to new DFO members

Crystal Beckel of Henderson; Ross Beitzel, Lone Tree; Jane Cates, Littleton; Lynn Dierker, Denver; Sharon Gatliffe, Denver; Frank and Shelley Joy, Lakewood; Jennifer Larson, Littleton; Brian and Christine Macdonald, Centennial; Michael Millner, Denver; Noelle Nicholson, Boulder; Anne Pizzi, Boulder; Doug Ward, Denver; Saul Weiss and Nicole Buyck, Parker; and Gigi Zarzuela, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Kathy Bollhoefer

Friends of DFO
Kathy Bollhoefer, and Brian and Christine Macdonald

The Lark Bunting newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists is published monthly except for joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submit original articles to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. Editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any such materials.

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Soon it'll be fall, y'all . . . and has DFO got an autumn program lineup for you

Patrick O'Driscoll

Before you know it, we'll be back after DFO's traditional summer vacation from monthly programs (and a one-month hiatus for this newsletter, too). But before we head off to summer birding and beating the heat, DFO's program manager, **Bill Turner**, has confirmed a nifty and thought-provoking slate of four fourth-Monday evening presentations from August through November.

As we've done ever since the COVID-19 pandemic started, these autumn programs will be held online via Zoom webinar. Online attendance has exploded in comparison with in-person monthly meetings, and DFO is committed to reaching larger audiences with programs that can originate from almost anywhere on the planet.

Ironically, this year's fall presentations will all originate here in Colorado, but the topics span the spectrum. Here are previews of each, including registration links for the first two in August and September. More details and links for the others will follow in upcoming issues of *The Lark Bunting*.

Nathan Pieplow
CU Boulder

The Best Bird Songs You've Never Heard

Nathan Pieplow
Monday, August 22
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

When Colorado bird authority **Nathan Pieplow**'s name is on the program marquee, we have learned to expect the unexpected. The intriguing title for his DFO evening program for Aug. 22 guarantees a trip somewhere most of us have never been before.

"What if I told you that cormorants, vultures, and House Sparrows are some of the most accomplished avian singers in North America?" asks Pieplow, one of Colorado's foremost birders. "Maybe you've never heard them before. Or maybe you've never heard them quite this way. This presentation will delve into the surprising world of bird songs that are hidden, underappreciated, and sometimes flat-out denied to exist."

An intense student of bird sounds for two decades, Pieplow will guide webinar participants to "discover the concealed complexity inside the grunts and gargles of a cormorant; hear the surprising sound of a vulture's flight display, and learn about the common bird whose song you may have missed, because it sings at three in the morning, flying high overhead against a backdrop of stars."

As the author of the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds*, Pieplow promises to "unravel the mysteries of some of the rarest and most startling sounds" in his 20-year collection of nature sound recording.

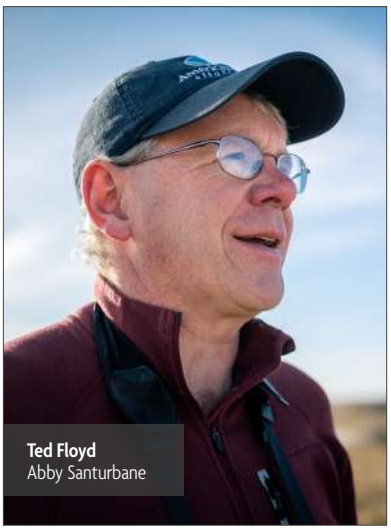
Continued on page 6

FALL PROGRAMS *cont from page 5*

Based in Boulder, Pieplow is a former editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists' *Colorado Birds* quarterly journal. He is also an author of the Colorado Birding Trail website. His Peterson Field Guide includes separate volumes for western and eastern North America.

A native of South Dakota, Pieplow grew up fascinated by birds. His day job is as an assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder.

To register for this free Aug. 22 Zoom program, click this registration link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_xv36fugcTweyGmLJhTzxMQ
You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Pieplow's presentation as the date approaches.



Ted Floyd
Abby Santurbane

Letting Go: Birding and Nature Study in the Age of Zoomers and Alphas

Ted Floyd
September 26
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Attention Baby Boom and Gen X birders: Hold onto your wide-brimmed Sahalie hats and multipocketed khaki vests. Your moment of 21st century birding Zen is at hand. Thus will sayeth the generational prophet, birder and prolific author **Ted Floyd** in a most provocative evening presentation on Sept. 26.

Floyd, the Lafayette-based, longtime editor of American Birding Association's award-winning *Birding* magazine, will address the "peaceful transfer of power to the next generation, or generations, of advocates for birds and nature and the whole world." He adds that he will "gently" exhort birding elders "to step aside and get out of the way. But with a twist: 'They' can't get there without 'us.' Not quite yet."

(Gulp.) "They"?

Floyd, author of five books ("with several more on the way"), most recently *How to Know the Birds*, is talking about the birding culture of our youngest cohorts — in which case, should he retitle his talk to "How to Know the Zoomers and Alphas"? From Z to A, Floyd's "they" stands for members of Generation Z (also known as Zoomers) and their younger siblings (Alphas).

Promising a "spirited and respectful" session, Floyd says it's a given for most of us that "a world with more birders is a better world. More birders translates into more people knowledgeable about science and nature, which in turn leads to positive action in the world we all share."

But how to get there across generations? "The standard model for our age is welcomeness and inclusivity," Floyd continues. "We just need to smile and say hello, basically. But what if the methods and mores of Gen X and Boomer birders are incompatible

Continued on page 7

FALL PROGRAMS *cont from page 6*

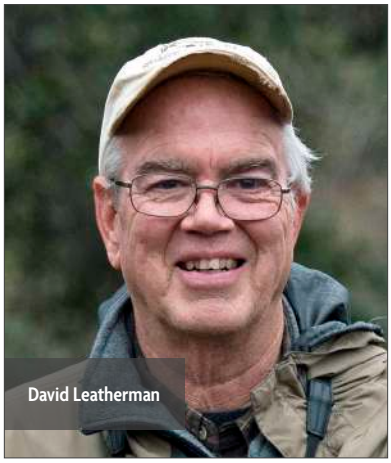
with those of Alpha and Zoomer birders (with Millennials caught up in the great middle)? What if their aspiration and ideals are ill-served by ours?"

The way forward, he says, is for birding elders to "let go. Binoculars and field guides, waking up early and joining bird clubs, even field ID and keeping a list — maybe birding doesn't have to be about any of that" in the world that Zoomers and Alphas will inherit.

"Definitely not another 'How to Use eBird' or 'Shorebirds Made Simple' presentation!" Floyd wisecracked in an advance note about his upcoming talk. *Definitely* sure to stir lively discussion and thought for the proverbial young and old alike.

The author of more than 200 popular articles, technical papers and book chapters on birds and nature, Floyd is especially interested in analyzing bird vocalizations, interpreting birds and nature for children and beginners, and applying new media and technologies to nature appreciation. He counts as an annual highlight co-leading a nature study field trip with his birder-daughter **Hannah** for second graders at the local elementary school.

To register for this free Sept. 26 Zoom program, click this registration link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_zm7ma0CIRXW_B6bu-vGNBw
You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Floyd's presentation as the date approaches.


David Leatherman

Life History of the Best Tree in Our World

David Leatherman
October 24
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

When **David Leatherman** — curious birder, expert bugman, exacting photographer and deft wordsmith — told us the subject of his Oct. 24 DFO evening presentation, he described it with this riddle:

"They smell like vanilla, sport dimples in their bark, feed pine beetles, house Pygmy Nuthatches, inspired **Albert Bierstadt**, frame the Front Range, fuel ferocious fires and comfort squirrels with tufted ears."

"They," Leatherman concluded, are ponderosa pines, "the best tree in our world" by his considerable estimation. Sign up for his free Zoom presentation, and Leatherman will tell you why. His talk will "celebrate the natural history of this wonderful tree, featuring the diverse birdlife among its boughs."

A veteran of numerous previous DFO presentations, Leatherman served more than three decades as the forest entomologist for the Colorado State Forest Service (1974-2005). Out of his deep background in the insects that draw birds into Colorado's forests, Leatherman has seen 460 avian species in the state. That's an astounding 89.3 percent of the 515 species ever recorded in Colorado.

Continued on page 8

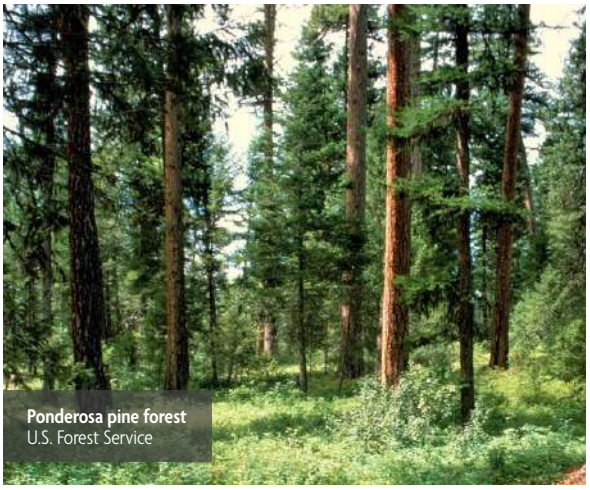
FALL PROGRAMS *cont from page 7*

It's hard to overshadow a birding record like that, but Leatherman is probably better-known for his meticulous, passionate, 35 years of close attention to what birds here eat. Since 2010, he has answered that in his widely read "The Hungry Bird" column in *Colorado Birds*, the quarterly journal of Colorado Field Ornithologists. Between columns, he regularly regales readers of CFO's COBirds email list-serv with accounts of frequent investigations (sometimes with photos of nearly microscopic creepy-crawlies) into what recent and notable birds are eating. Leatherman's movable feast ranges from Fort Collins's Grandview Cemetery (the remarkably birdy " backyard" he has birded more than 2,000 times) to faraway groves across the state.

Born in 1949 and raised in the shadow of the football stadium at Ohio State University, Leatherman was drawn to nature from childhood. He earned his bachelor's degree in biology from Marietta (OH) College and master's in forestry from Duke University. He counts the Blackburnian Warbler as his favorite bird, and he thinks Odell's 90 Shilling Ale "should be the state microbrew."

Look for more details and a Zoom registration link for Leatherman's Oct. 24 program in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Red Crossbill in ponderosa pine
David Leatherman



Ponderosa pine forest
U.S. Forest Service

Emma Riley and Northern Harrier

Hawk Watch 2022: Looking back, and forward

Emma Riley
Monday, November 28
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Raptor biologist-naturalist **Emma Riley** was the full-time hawk counter and daily on-site coordinator during the 10-week season of DFO's Hawk Watch program on Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County this past spring. She will speak about national Hawk Watch efforts — where they are and why they matter — and present an update on the results and trends for DFO's local Hawk Watch this year.

A wildlife biology graduate of Colorado State University, Riley has worked previously in the field with Ferruginous Hawks in Wyoming, breeding passerines there and in Idaho, and most recently at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, MN during fall migration.

Look for more details and a Zoom registration link for Riley's Nov. 28 presentation in an upcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share them: club news, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life (and life bird!) events, and any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany. Send your items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor* ***Patrick O'Driscoll*** *at* patodrisk@gmail.com.

TAKE A MEMO: WE'VE GOT A NEW CLUB SECRETARY

Denver Field Ornithologists' annual election in April of officers and board members had a noticeable hole in the ballot. After no one had stepped forward to run for secretary, the position was left vacant. Club secretary **Peter Stoltz** chose not to run again so he could focus fully on volunteer duty with DFO webinars and other tech matters. But just a month later, another DFO member has stepped forward. At its quarterly meeting April 18, the DFO Board unanimously appointed **Nathan "Nate" Bond** of Denver, a high school chemistry teacher, as interim secretary. He will serve until the next DFO election in April 2023, when he can stand for election.

Nate Bond

Bond, who joined DFO in 2021, came to Colorado about 12 years ago from Lincoln, NE. He took up birding in the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak after his wife, **Alex**, bought him a pair of binoculars. "I had always joked that I wanted to be a birder," said Nate, but he figured he'd "wait until I got old and retired so I'd have something new and fun to do. Alex got them for me so I could start 'practicing.'" Soon he was out at nearby Bear Creek Park, where he ID'd a House Wren as his first bird. He heard about DFO from another birder he met while chasing a rare shorebird at the same park. That birder was DFO field trip leader **Gregg Goodrich**. Bond joined DFO later that day. And yes, his first DFO field trip was led by . . . Gregg Goodrich.

STATE SEEKS BIRDERS' HELP WITH BREWER'S SPARROW PROJECT

Colorado Parks & Wildlife needs volunteer birders for an early summer community science project to help determine which kinds of Brewer's Sparrows are nesting in Colorado's high country. *Breeding Distribution of Brewer's Sparrows in Alpine Areas of Colorado* seeks to find out if birds in the study area are the state's prevalent sagebrush subspecies using uncommonly high-elevation habitat, or if there are "unconfirmed populations" of the less prevalent timberline subspecies.

The effort runs June 10 through July 31 and focuses on 31 priority alpine sites on public lands in 20 counties for Brewer's Sparrow surveys during the 2022 breeding season. The sites are spread across a north-south geographic swath covering roughly the middle one-third of Colorado. CPW "is looking for help from birders (who) can identify Brewer's Sparrows by sight and sound, safely hike off trail at high elevation, and use eBird" to document what they find.

The CPW publication, Citizen Science Project: Breeding Distribution of Brewer's Sparrows in Alpine Areas of Colorado, provides the whens, wheres, hows and whys of the project, as well as contact information for questions.

Brewer's Sparrow
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 10

PBS DOCUMENTARY TRACKS THREAT TO WEST'S GOLDEN EAGLES

"Golden Eagles: Witnesses to a Changing West," a new documentary that premiered on several PBS stations this spring, is coming to Colorado's PBS 12 on Sunday, June 26, at 4 p.m. MDT. It will air again on four more dates in June and July. The hour-long program tells the story of the challenges Golden Eagles face in the ever-changing West. Narrated by naturalist and author **Kenn Kaufman** (a DFO program presenter in 2020), the documentary follows researchers into the field with nesting birds in Wyoming's Bighorn Basin. It also goes behind the scenes at wildlife rehabilitation centers, delves into the challenges for wildlife coexisting with humans, climate change and sprawl, and tells of native peoples' connections to Golden Eagles. Other scheduled airings include Monday, June 27 (10 p.m.), Tuesday, July 12 (6 p.m.) and Thursday, July 28 (12 a.m.). For more, including a 30-second trailer for the film, visit the documentary's website at https://www.goldeneaglefilm.com/

Golden Eaglets
Wild Excellence Films via Facebook

MISSING BIRDS? AZ BIOLOGIST SEES CLIMATE'S SMOKING GUN

In recent years, we've noticed unexplained absences of familiar species during migration and other points in the annual cycle of birdlife around us. Unusual weather events, severe drought, rising temperatures and other phenomena seem the likeliest factors, though internet alarmists claim electromagnetic radiation from 5G cellular technology has caused mysterious mass bird die-offs. (Fact-checkers have debunked such claims, as National Audubon noted in this "Facebook falsehood" report more than two years ago.) **Tim Helentjaris**, a retired biologist in southeastern Arizona, recently put eBird data and southern AZ weather records together for a look into the absence of Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Canyon Wrens and other common species in his area.

Tucson Audubon biologist **Jennie MacFarland** collaborated with Helentjaris, who published their disturbing findings on the organization's *Chip Notes* blog in late May. In Where are all the birds? The lingering effects of 2020, he expresses alarm that populations of 15 species that declined since that "catastrophic" drought year show little sign of rebound. "Is this what global warming looks like in the Southwest?" he asked. Thanking eBirders for "a robust dataset" of tens of thousands of observations, he said his climate-bird inquiry will continue, adding: "Stay tuned."

Meanwhile, anyone here wondering what global warming's effect on birds may look like in Colorado?

BIRDSONG PROJECT" CELEBRATES THROUGH MUSIC, POETRY

National Audubon has brought together "For the Birds: The Birdsong Project," an ambitious five-part compendium of birdsong-inspired music, poetry, native chants, and spoken-word performances by a long list of notable artists, actors, writers and others, from **Beck**, **Yo-Yo Ma**, **Elvis Costello** and **Jarvis Cocker** to **Jonathan Franzen**, **Matthew McConaughey**, **Yoko Ono** and **Tilda Swinton**. From May through September, five new volumes of music will feature a combined cast of more than 220 musicians, actors, authors and visual artists on 170 music tracks, more than 60 poems and 20 visual artworks. You can view a synopsis of the project on this YouTube video. Proceeds will benefit National Audubon.

If the first of the five releases is an indication, it has a somewhat New Age-y bent — 47 echoing, contemplative tracks with elements of folk, jazz, psychedelic, hip-hop, trance and other genres in an overall World Music vibe. Track titles run the gamut from *Counting Birds and Cuckoo Song* to *On The Wing* and *Why Does the Girl Bird Sing?* It is available on numerous streaming services (as will the others, released one at a time each month from June through September). Eventually a limited edition 20-LP boxed set will be available. For more context with a New York-focused take, read *The New York Times*'s overview of the project here: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/17/arts/music/for-the-birds-birdsong.html

FIELD TRIP REVIEW

Field Tripping: Lamar — aka, springtime across SE Colorado

The trip: Southeast Colorado (Baca, Bent, Crowley, Elbert, Kiowa + Prowers counties)
Dates: Monday-Wednesday, May 9-11, 2022
Leader: David Suddjian + 8 participants
Species: 132 across 39 eBird checklists

Greater Roadrunner on Two Buttes canyon rim
Kenneth Stuckey

Photos top to bottom:
Birders at Two Buttes (David Suddjian)
Northern Cardinal (Gary Witt)
Greater Roadrunner, with lizard (Gary Witt)

David Suddjian (with Ann, Kathy, Ken, Susan, Betty, Gary and Elaine, below)
Southeastern Colorado — a multicounty corner of the state affectionately known to birders simply as "Lamar" — is top-of-the-list for any Colorado birder in May. Going into this three-day DFO excursion, we knew the ongoing drought and limited water in the region would affect what we'd see. The forecast warned of high winds and temperatures above 90. Fortunately, the weather gave us a few breaks, but boy, did we bake! Our multiday adventure produced life birds and state birds for all nine participants, whether veterans or newer birders. That's the value of spring across far-flung "Lamar," a rich and important experience for each of us on our own birding journeys. And for sustenance on this satisfying sojourn, we unanimously recommend Lucy's Tacos in Lamar!

Hear that coming from the marsh? It definitely counts
After a long, hot and windy first day, we gathered at La Mission Villanueva in Lamar for dinner. My only goal after that was to get back to my room and go to bed. Then David and Gary talked about returning to a marsh at John Martin Reservoir to "look" for the rare Black Rail, which would only be heard, not seen. Not accomplished in birding by ear, I had never claimed a new species from its song or call. But wanting to improve, I went along. As we arrived at the marsh, we were not alone. Two researchers from Colorado Parks & Wildlife were monitoring species numbers for Sora, Virginia Rail and Black Rail. When they played the booming and distinctive *"ki-ki-kerr"* of the Black Rail, several answered back from across the reeds. One called close by and others were more distant. Their responses were so loud, I'd have thought the birds were the size of bitterns. But David assured me the Black Rail is only as big as a sparrow. As we stayed and listened in the cool of the evening, I realized this was the first bird I would count on my life list and probably never see.
— Ann Larson, Snowmass Village

Quiz: What under the sky were we talking about?
Here are eight snippets of conversation overheard during our birding trip. Try to guess the bird reference for each, then read the numbered answers below.

1. "Is it wagging its tail downward or flicking it up and down?"
2. "It's yellow below with a dark grayish head and olive back" . . . "Does it have white eye arcs?"
3. "Quick! Get on this swallow!!"
4. "It's a Myrtle. No, wait. No yellow rump and it has a yellow cap, but I don't see any brown"
5. "Whose butt is that?"
6. "What's '*skylarking*'?"
7. "How many are there on the breast? Is it broken or complete?"
8. "It's only 2,000 more feet to walk to the next state!"

Continued on page 13

FIELD TRIPPING *cont from page 12*

Answers:

1. *Gray Flycatcher*, Olney Springs, Crowley Co.
2. Chasing a *Mourning Warbler*, Van's Grove, Bent Co.
3. *Purple Martin*, surprise migrant at Kiowa Creek, Kiowa Co.
4. *Chestnut-sided Warbler*, Kiowa Creek
5. *Mississippi Kite*, rear view in Lamar, Prowers Co.
6. *Cassin's Sparrows* performing song flights near Two Buttes Reservoir, Baca Co.
7. Comparing *Piping*, *Semipalmated* and *Snowy plovers* at John Martin Reservoir, Bent
8. Contemplating a walk into Oklahoma from Picture Canyon, Baca

— *Kathy Holland, Centennial*

All the road running's *not* in vain

David often refers to fellow participants on his field trips as "roadrunners," an appropriate description on a three-day journey with about 650 miles of driving. Fittingly, our eagle-eyed birders located — and tracked — a Greater Roadrunner scurrying along the rim of the canyon wall at Two Buttes. We even saw it carrying a freshly caught lizard.

— *Ken Stuckey, Highlands Ranch*

So many birds to enjoy . . . plants and people, too

Highlights for me were the roadrunner, cardinals, Blue Grosbeak, a spectacularly backlit Ferruginous Hawk, and, of course, the Cliff Swallows nesting at Two Buttes. I also enjoyed viewing the Chihuahuan Raven on her nest, the dancing Western Kingbirds and Mississippi Kites, baby owls, turkeys, and turtles. Plants and people keep my interest when birding is challenging.

— *Susan Suddjian, Littleton*

Amazing birds despite the dry — but some migrants missing

It was great to visit the Lamar region again. I got my fix of Northern Cardinals at the community college, and Two Buttes and Picture Canyon were amazing. My best bird? Hearing those very loud Black Rails at John Martin Reservoir. But the winds were fierce at times over our three days in the field, and we could both see and feel the effects of Colorado's long-term drought. Many expected migrants were just not there. It was the first time I've seen dry irrigation ditches at Melody Tempel Grove. Although the consequences of the drought were clear, it was still a wonderful birding trip!

— *Betty Glass, Littleton*

Missisippi Kite
Gary Witt

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Never birded here? Priceless rewards await you

If you have never birded in southeastern Colorado, take the time. It can be hot and dry (exceptionally so just now), but there are so many interesting places to explore: riparian corridors, lakes, charming towns, and canyons. Yes, *canyons* on the Great Plains, unexpected places that surprise first-timers with the region's scenic, geological and historical wonders. Although not quite the rich potpourri of migrants we had hoped for, this trip's great leadership and camaraderie gave us observations of more than 130 species. Spending a day with like-minded birders is rewarding, but spending multiple days together opens deeper connections — evening conversations around a communal dinner table, or an after-dark Black Rail outing — that are priceless.
— Gary Witt, Denver

Shorebird treasures beyond what we seek

Approaching John Martin Reservoir, it stretches for miles. We choose the north shore. Our target is Piping Plover, known to breed in the area. Consulting the maps, our lead car finds a man-made island by a dividing canal. There we find not just our target plover, but Snowy Plover and Semipalmated Plover, too. And so much more: Willet, Forster's Tern, Marbled Godwit. Smaller shorebirds occupy a nearby bay. Mission accomplished.
— Elaine Wagner. Littleton

Ferruginous Hawk
Kathy Holland

Purple Martin
Gary Witt

Two Buttes, Baca County
David Suddjian

Karen Drozda

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:
Up close with master birder Karen Drozda

Editor's note: ***In the Scope*** *is a series of Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, and other volunteers and members who participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email* The Lark Bunting *at patodrisk@gmail.com*

Name: **Karen Drozda**
Home city: **Denver**
Occupation: **Surgical assistant for most of career**

How and when I became a birder?

I became a semi-casual birder about age 8, in my native Lincoln, NE. We moved to Boulder from there when I was 14. Growing up in Nebraska, I was a dorky and curious kid who would stargaze in our backyard, seated in one of those crisscross-webbing lounge chairs on the lawn. I would watch birds in spring and fall migration from the same vantage point, using my dad's super-heavy binoculars. (He loved the outdoors.) I had no idea what species they all were, but I do remember seeing Canada Geese and Sandhill Cranes flying over in formation. It was the start of my lifelong curiosity about birds. Later, as a trained musician (I studied cello and choral music through high school and college), I became more curious about birds' songs and behavior. I have had many other passions throughout my life, but birding became a serious one about 20 years ago.

When and why I joined DFO?

After completing the Denver Audubon Master Birder program in in 2014, I wanted to apply what I'd learned to help other birders. **Karen Von Saltza**, who was DFO's field trip director, was my mentor in Master Birder, and she encouraged me to become a trip leader with DFO. The club had so many great speakers in its monthly evening programs, and such a variety of interesting and challenging field trips, that I became hooked.

First DFO trip I went on?

My first DFO field trip was in about 2012. We went to Lair O' The Bear Park in Jefferson County, and Von Saltza led the trip along with **Michael Kiesseg**. I was not a club member at the time, and my binoculars were not the greatest, but I could see birds well enough. I remember how Karen and Michael made the trip so interesting, especially in identifying migrant birds, as it was spring. They gave me a better understanding of field marks in identifying species. Michael was so knowledgeable in sharing facts about the habitat and plants, too.

How/why I became a trip leader?

I have been told by my three sisters that I have a propensity to gab with strangers. And I do get very excited about sharing my skills as a birder with others. I want developing birders not to feel intimidated, and I will make a special effort to help them "get on" the birds. I like to introduce them to new ways to hear and remember birdsong.

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IN THE SCOPE *cont from page 15*

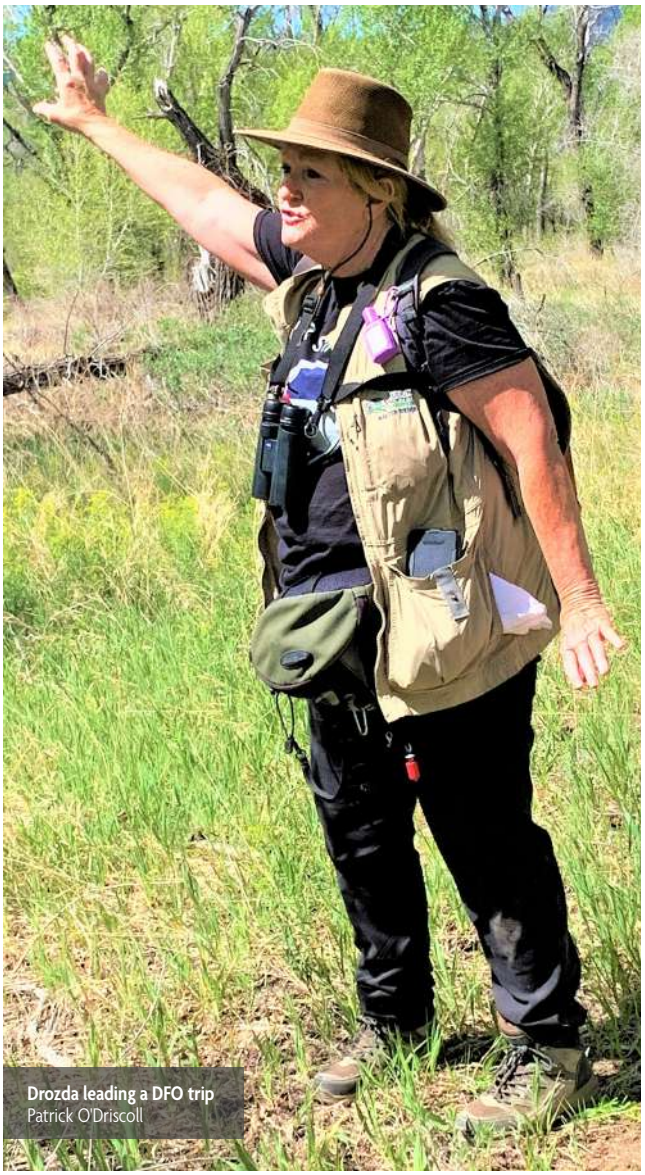
I also learn from others on our field trips. Sometimes they pose questions that I cannot answer, which leads me to do "the great Google search" when I get home. I still hone and refine my skills in hopes of making field trips more interesting — studying birds' field marks, songs and behaviors, instead of just ticking species off the list on a trip.

First field trip I led?

The first DFO field trip I led was in my home "patch" — historic Fairmount Cemetery in southeast Denver. The Highline Canal trail, which runs through the cemetery, once had a wonderful line of ponderosa pines and other conifers. When we got there, the group was thrilled to see a small flock of Red Crossbills feeding on the cones, something I'd never seen in the cemetery. They were certainly the bird of the day. My trip participants were also enthralled with the cemetery's headstones, chiseled with the names of numerous famous Denverites and Coloradans.

Favorite DFO field trip destination?

El Dorado Canyon State Park near Boulder. As a young teen in Boulder, I would ride my bike to the park to go swimming in the artesian spring pool. Birders who have never been to El Dorado will be excited by the spectacular views, the geology and most importantly the variety of species there during migration. Often the birds are close to the trail, making it easy to identify species, study their field marks and listen to their song. The habitat is mostly Douglas fir and ponderosa pine, with birds regularly found in them.



Drozda leading a DFO trip
Patrick O'Driscoll

Best DFO field trip ever?

That's easy. On Feb. 17, 2018, the late **Joe Roller** arranged for DFO field trip leaders to accompany **Chris Wood**, then lead scientist for eBird, on a day-long chase trip across Larimer County. Chris, who grew up in Morrison and Denver, is now director of eBird and also managing director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Center for Avian Population Studies in Ithaca, NY. He was in town to speak two nights later at DFO's monthly program meeting. It was fantastic to go birding with an eBird expert on his old Colorado home turf, and our group of eight had a long and amazing day. We started birding at Lake Loveland at about 7 a.m. and finished at Fort Collins City Park near 4 p.m. We made 11 other stops in between at familiar eBird hotspots like Bobcat Ridge, Horsetooth, Topminnow, Arapahoe Bend, Big Thompson Ponds and, of course, the Larimer County Landfill.

My field trip philosophy?

Listen with your eyes, see with your ears, and have fun!

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

I think before I go international, I would love to bird in southern Arizona and Texas in the late winter or early spring, to catch the cycle of migration as so many species fly north from Mexico and Central and South America.

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IN THE SCOPE *cont from page 16*

The next trip I'm leading?

On June 19, I'm leading a trip to Flying J Ranch Park near Conifer in Jefferson County. Flying J has a lot of ponderosa pines, which means it will be ripe for nesting sapsuckers and other woodpeckers. I like its easy access, and its good variety of "sit spots" to pause and observe birds at length.

My favorite birding patch?

For more than 20 years I have birded at least weekly in Fairmount Cemetery, Denver's second-oldest and most historic graveyard after Riverside Cemetery. Fairmount may be the largest arboretum in Colorado, though it has lost many trees to drought over the years. The variety of birds was once broad and plentiful — until Denver Water stopped running water through the Highline Canal. That has affected many of the park's tree species, too. The cemetery's directors added a butterfly memorial garden, which also attracts hummingbirds. The wild habitat behind that garden can surprise me with gnatcatchers, warblers, flycatchers and more. Nearby is a pond that supplies irrigation water for the cemetery grounds. Russian Olives and a variety of weed species surround the pond, all good habitat for sparrows. Sadly, the West Nile Virus outbreak in 2005 killed many birds in and around Fairmount, especially magpies and crows. A city crew came out every morning to collect the carcasses of birds that died overnight.

In the field
Patrick O'Driscoll

COMMUNITY SCIENCE

After 5 + years, DFO's nest-colony observation project will go "DIY"

In 2017, DFO launched an ambitious "community science" project and recruited members to monitor and report on the state of colonies of large waterbirds that nest in several Denver area parks. The Colonial Waterbirds Project, proposed and created by DFO members **Chuck Hundertmark** and **Patrick O'Driscoll** with help from others, sought to pay closer attention to population trends and habitat conditions for popular colonies of herons, egrets and cormorants that nest from spring through summer within our urban and suburban midst.

Unfortunately, the project's ambition exceeded its grasp. After a first year of promising participation by a couple of dozen members, interest dropped off markedly and has never recovered. Initially, participants filed observations as "details" comments in their eBird checklists from any of four public locations (Denver's City Park and Washington Park, Belmar Park in Lakewood, and Wheat Ridge Greenbelt) and a fifth restricted-access site. But owing to the difficulty of distilling widely varying forms of data out of individual eBird filings, we shifted project operation in 2018 to CitSci.org, a community-science platform where participants log separate observations using more scientifically rigorous reporting forms. (The data exist there as Colorado Colony Watch, under the umbrella of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies.)

In giving up eBird reporting convenience for a database that better matched our needs, we failed to re-engage club members. The project's open-ended nature — slowly building, season after season, a database without knowing how or when it would be useful for conservation action to help these colonies — made it a tough sell in recruiting observers. At the same time, recruitment, admittedly spotty, largely ceased once the COVID-19 epidemic suspended most DFO activity for more than a year. For project coordinator O'Driscoll, new responsibility as editor of DFO's *The Lark Bunting* newsletter in 2020 added another, higher priority task.

As a result, O'Driscoll advised the DFO Board at its May 2022 meeting that he would no longer be able to manage the project. He noted that as of then, only five observations, all by one observer from one location, had been filed this year. He also said the waterbirds project lacked a home in any standing DFO committee that would have ensured a transition in leadership.

As a fallback, O'Driscoll suggested that DFO members may still participate individually — in a more do-it-yourself version of community science — by returning to the eBird checklist reporting protocol under which the waterbirds project was launched. That way, any researchers using the eBird database for nesting and colony information at these locations and on these species might again benefit from detailed DFO member observations on eBird checklists. Hence, DFO won't need to tease out data on its own.

And so this summer, DFO will begin to revamp the project webpage to reflect a transition to promote individual data gathering from waterbird nesting colonies for years to come. This facelift of the DFO website's pages and how-to documents should be complete before the start of the breeding season in 2023.

FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

Like a "big year," DFO's 2022 field trips are holding their record pace

David Suddjian

What a year for field trips, and we're not yet halfway through it. As of May, Denver Field Ornithologists has led 105 field trips in 2022. That's an average of one outing every 1.4 days.

This record pace will take DFO to a new high this year. Our field trips have already visited 36 of Colorado's 64 counties, adding three new ones to DFO's statewide checklist in eBird. We've taken four overnight trips so far, with more planned this summer. Three trips have crossed the state line — two into New Mexico (25 species) and one briefly into Kansas (eight species).

And with 287 bird species recorded on our Colorado trips this year, DFO is on pace for its best species year ever after the club's 2018 Big Year

If you weren't with us in 2018 or might have forgotten, the DFO Big Year sought as many species as we could record, but only on official club field trips. It was the first time DFO expanded its field-trip reach to include all corners of Colorado. Most of those outings were planned two months in advance of their dates, but DFO added a few trips on short notice to chase rare or unusual birds for the Big Year effort.

In the end, our 2018 Big Year set new records, with 361 species recorded on 181 field trips, both well in excess of prior years. After the COVID-19 pandemic halted DFO field trips for more than a year in 2020-21, the club was able to ramp the field trip program back up. Today, we are at our strongest pace ever.

Although 2018 really was a big year, we will probably catch up to it — but we'll have to work at it. As I write this, DFO is also on a record pace for the number of eBird checklists submitted, with 623 complete lists in May alone. As of May, the club also surpassed 6,000 cumulative complete eBird checklists from our outings.

Along with the great (and unending) flow of field trips, DFO also has provided quality birding experiences for so many people, we may set a record for participation, too. Through May, 331 different individuals have participated in outings this year, led by 21 DFO trip leaders and four guest leaders. This pace is nearly double the previous high. Many of those hundreds of participants were on their first-ever DFO trip, some on their first organized birdwatching trip of any kind.

DFO field trips and participation are up
David Suddjian

Heading into summer, we look forward to a strong slate of trip offerings, with excursions in every direction. There will be trips on Colorado's eastern prairies, where the birding will likely be as high as the temperatures. There will be cooler outings in the mountains, too, with abundant birdsong and wildflowers.

Take advantage of the great variety of trips we will offer this summer and visit somewhere new — or revisit a place you love. If you plan ahead, why not have a friend who's never been on a DFO trip register with you? That's DFO, where all are welcome.

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trip chair since August 2021, came to Colorado in 2013 from his native California. Since 2016, he has led more than 200 DFO outings. This year he created the "Bird Bombs" series of short species-ID webinars.

BIRD ID TRAINING

More *Bird Bombs* about to drop: Summer species ID sessions on Zoom

After a fast start and enthusiastic reception for its first two webinars, DFO's new *Bird Bombs* series of free, brief, intensive and fun bird ID webinars via Zoom is expanding. Four more of these half-hour bursts of helpful bird identification tips are scheduled in June, July and August.

Here's the rundown of summer *Bird Bombs* titles and topics, with online links to register for these sessions (registration is required but free). Note that webinar times may vary (all times MDT):

Thursday, June 23, 2 p.m.:
4 and 20 Black Birds
(six species of blackbirds and allies)
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_KNnCl30WR_q_Jq1j3dWUgA

Thursday, July 14, 7 p.m.:
Summer Hummers
(Broad-tailed, Rufous, Calliope and Black-chinned hummingbirds)
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_TjnonfuSQbOwlzmZLpyOkw

Thursday, Aug. 4, 7 p.m.:
It Has Yellow Legs
(eight shorebird species with yellow legs)
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Uz98t9PkQU-V8SJuYzMFhg

Thursday, Aug. 18, 7 p.m.:
The Little Pipers
(seven peeps species in genus Calidris)
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_n-Vh8_QmQSKUigMqL4CChQ

The first two installments of Bird Bombs were a hit with participants. Zoom recordings of both those quick-hit webinars — April 28's "Spring into Warblers" (common spring warblers) and May 19's "Kings of the Road" (kingbirds and allies) are now available on the Denver Field Ornithologists website at: https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx.

A DFO shirt from Zazzle

DFO NEWS

Zazzle dazzle: Gear up with new logo merch from DFO's online shop

Sharon Tinianow

A variety of items from T-shirts to water bottles to travel mugs, all featuring Denver Field Ornithologists' new logo, are now available for order from the "Official DFO Shop" on Zazzle, a print-on-demand service. You can order items in a variety of colors and sizes, and proceeds from merchandise sales will help support DFO projects like Hawk Watch, the Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund, and general club operations.

To visit the shop, click this link:
https://www.zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop

The DFO Board chose to use Zazzle because it allows members to order what they want on-demand, in the size and color they need when they are ready. It does not require our club to maintain an inventory of merchandise or to pay for items that end up not being interesting enough to members for DFO to keep in stock.

DFO's print-on-demand shop at Zazzle.com was developed by the chairs of two club committees, Membership (**Sue Summers**) and Communications & Outreach (**Sharon Tinianow**). Besides expressing camaraderie and pride in belonging to DFO, wearing and carrying DFO logo items will spread the word about our club. This will help raise DFO's profile in the community while also supporting our mission of bird appreciation and conservation.

We'll be adding new items to the shop from time to time, so it's worth saving the link and checking back to see what's new. Up next is likely to be baseball-style caps embroidered with our colorful "dfo feather" emblem.

And by the way: Although the main page of the online store labels women's and men's T-shirts only as "black" or "white," when you click on a specific item, the next page reveals a rainbow of available color choices.

Don't see any item you'd like with the new DFO "brand"? Contact Summers with your requests and ideas for new ones. You can reach Sue at summerssue@hotmail.com. And when you do order something, send *The Lark Bunting* a selfie of yourself with your new DFO-themed purchase so we can share! Submit your photos to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, began birding in an ornithology class in college. Now DFO vice president, she previously was editor of *The Lark Bunting* and chairs the Communications & Outreach Committee.

Florida Scrub-Jay with acorns
Rebecca Laroche

DFO ESSAY

Tales of a reluctant (bird) photographer

Rebecca Laroche

I put it off as long as I could. I began birding seriously in spring of 2015, frequently going on DFO field trips. But it wasn't until the waning months of 2018 — long after I had upgraded my binoculars, a year after I bought a scope — that I bought my camera.

My reasons were many:

- I birded first with my ears, not my eyes!
- I took *terrible* photos
- There were already so many outstanding photographers in DFO
- I didn't want to filter my experience through the lens of a camera
- I wanted to get to know the birds by watching them

The list went on.

Perhaps I developed these excuses because I am verbal by nature. Words have always been my filter for experience. Bookish and brainy, I have loved writing as long as I can remember doing it. On the spectrum of nonvisual to visual, I do not visualize. Photography just is not my medium.

Even as my own ABA birding life list was approaching 500, I continued to resist while those around me took spectacular photos. With every eBird checklist, they were contributing to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Macaulay Library archive. Then, in fall of 2018, on another amazing DFO outing, an acquaintance and eBird monitor walking alongside me said, "You know, we sometimes have birders who are seeing rarities, but without photos, we can't know what they've seen." I knew my acquaintance was speaking directly to me, albeit obliquely.

I replied that I heard what was being said. Within a month, I bought my camera. Nothing elaborate, expensive, or heavy — the current one in the Canon XS series — but a camera that several friends swore was easy to use, particularly appealing to someone who for years had carried around a list of reasons *not* to buy a camera. As soon as the battery was charged, I made myself use it, but only on automatic focus, thus keeping intact a bit of my non-photographer self. But after I accidentally found a Golden-crowned Kinglet in a frame that I snapped on another DFO trip, I understood something I had not admitted to myself until then: Using a camera when birding isn't about artistry; it's about documentation.

Since my reluctant purchase, I've come to see that this new endeavor has many facets. As that friendly eBird monitor let me know, photographing birds doesn't just confirm rarities, it also does much more. Here are two lessons I've already learned.

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DFO ESSAY *cont from page 20*

Tale 1: The Merlin algorithm

In my first year with camera, I had a great opportunity to join a spring birding trip to High Island, TX with **Taylor**, a former DFO member who's now an eBird tech developer. Only six months after buying the camera, I still struggled to remember I had this extra new appendage. Excited by a sighting, I often forgot to reach for my camera. When I did, the image I captured was often little more than a tail and a wingtip.

I told Taylor that if he had better shots, I'd defer to his for upload to our shared eBird checklist. "Not necessarily," he replied. "Cornell needs bad photos too!" He went on to explain that the algorithm for the Merlin Bird ID app is built on bad photos of correctly identified species. It's a fallacy that only good photos are valuable. If Merlin users were trying to identify a species using the perfect image, they could just compare it to one in a field guide. It might better help a user ID the bird when more common *bad* photos align with bad photos inside that Merlin database. Every birder-photographer tries for and posts the lovely snapshot of a Prothonotary Warbler perched and singing, but how many upload a photo of the underside of its tail? (I did! See below, right)

The point here is not to upload every photo you take. Rather, it may be that a bad shot of a seldom-seen bird, or a part of a bird not usually seen, can be more valuable than yet another picture-perfect image of an often-photographed species.

In his field guide on those other winged creatures, author and bird expert **Kenn Kaufman** writes: "If you seek out some of the less common butterflies, you may wind up taking the world's best photos of those species." (*Kaufman Field Guide to Butterflies of North America*) Even your worst photo of a furtive sparrow or warbler may offer something exceptional.

Tale 2: Target species and research tags

By late fall of 2021 (year three with my camera if you're counting), I had collected photos for about 70 percent of the species I'd seen. I had also made up for the previous three birding years without a camera by regularly traveling to the South and East to see friends and family. On one such road trip to Florida, I arranged to meet my friend **Rick**, a transplanted Colorado birder who lives outside Atlanta. The Georgia birds were plentiful — too many kinglets of both kinds to count.

When Rick shared the checklist, I was most impressed by his photos. I had noticed that he was busily taking pictures not just of rare birds but ordinary ones. When I mentioned this, he explained he was trying to get shots of the species he'd already seen but not photographed. I responded with a question that had been nagging me: "How do you find out which photos you need?"

Rick told me it's easy and directed me to eBird's Target Species page. Here are the complete steps:

1. Click "Explore" at the top of eBird, then scroll to "Target Species" and click again
2. Now click the "cog" icon at far right
3. Under "Targets category," click the drop-down menu arrow at right and select "Photo Targets"

Soon after learning this, I spent a month in Florida grading finals and visiting with kin. This newfound eBird tool sparked and focused the briefer outings (1-2 hours) that I could squeeze in between work and family commitments. After returning home, I quickly filled two absences on my Colorado bird photo list, House Sparrow and Western Grebe. Although the photos lack artistic merit, the sparrow shot documents interesting feeding behavior, and the grebe image is of a late-season visitation. Just a few months later, I now have photos of 77 percent of my birds.

Different view of Prothonotary Warbler
Rebecca Laroche

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DFO ESSAY *cont from page 21*

Common Black Hawk feeding at Manitou Lake
Rebecca Laroche

Rick also told me that targeting species in different ways can help keep "the game" interesting when life limits your movements or the ecological impact of travel begs us to keep our chases closer to home. More importantly, this strategy asks us to prioritize the birds we may take for granted.

Recently, I've worked on pushing my camera and Cornell's algorithms further. In the "Manage Media" window for any of your eBird checklists, clicking on a photo shows these options:

- Foraging or eating
- Vocalizing
- Carrying Food
- Nest Building
- Flying
- Feeding Young
- Molting
- Courtship, Displaying or Copulating

These tags tell me what information most interests the ornithologists who use Cornell's eBird database. But for me, these allow me to search my photos and find images of more than 50 bird species feeding, for instance — from a Florida Scrub-Jay overloaded with acorns to a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch gleaning seeds along a road to a Townsend's Solitaire subduing a moth caught in its bill. At a glance, I can see the research potential for anyone interested in the culinary habits of, say, a specific species, a wintering flock, or the mountain thrushes.

Looking at this new pop-up gallery, I realize there are more than 500 birds I've already seen that I want to see again, doing different things. I also know that now, I want to see all of this with my *camera*.

Rebecca Laroche's first love was Shakespeare, and in writing and teaching about him and his contemporaries, she made her career as a professor in Colorado Springs. Her birding passion sparked in her late 30s, when a Little Blue Heron flew out of a Galveston mist.

COMMUNITY SCIENCE

Hawk Watch 2022: More eyes, more birds

Patrick O'Driscoll

The annual Hawk Watch tally of migrant raptor movement along the Front Range formally ended on May 7. After 68 days of observation from atop Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County, "We had the fourth-highest count in our 20-year history," Hawk Watch Committee chair **Dave Hill** reported to the DFO Board later in May.

The bottom line: 2,406 hawks, eagles, falcons, vultures and other birds of prey. The single busiest day was Saturday, April 16, when 254 migrating raptors flew overhead, more than one-tenth of the season's total.

Hill, DFO's immediate past president, said the count was the second highest ever for the number of birds of prey counted "per observer-hour." Record numbers were broken for four species: Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, Swainson's Hawk and Turkey Vulture. Counters also marked second-highest totals for Peregrine Falcon and Red-tailed Hawk.

Helping count were more than twice as many volunteers as in previous years, thanks to aggressive promotion and enthusiastic marketing of the club's role in the annual count. Thanks to DFO, the work was coordinated by a full-time counter, raptor biologist-naturalist **Emma Riley**. A veteran hawk counter and Colorado State University graduate, Riley oversaw more than 44 individual volunteers on the ridge.

DFO fronted this year's effort with $2,850 to cover Riley, but Hill told the DFO Board the amount was offset entirely by donations to DFO, individual contributions and a successful grant request. The program finished in the black.

"Emma was very appreciative of the volunteer help," said Hawk Watch Committee member **Janet Peters**. "They were especially helpful on high count days, helping spot birds and giving Emma more time to focus on identification."

An additional element in Hawk Watch 2022's success: Excited visitors, many of whom joined in. "We had more than 1,500 visitors this season," Peters said. "Many even stayed for an extended time to help us spot birds. We had some visitors return during the season with friends in tow to help us out."

She added that visitors' "most common reaction was, 'I had no idea that raptors migrate.' We even had people ask, 'Where are they going?' Many visitors also didn't realize the variety of species that fly over Dinosaur Ridge." In fact, during this year's 9-1/2-week season (March 1-May 7), observers recorded 21 species of hawks, eagles, falcons and vultures from the ridge, from the most numerous (Red-tailed Hawk, 768, Turkey Vulture, 513, and American Kestrel, 337) to the least (Rough-legged Hawk, 3, Northern Goshawk, 9, and Prairie Falcon, 11).

Many thanks to the 63 people who volunteered and otherwise contributed time to the Hawk Watch effort this season. They include:

Doug Anderson, Ajit and **Liza Antony, Susan Arntson, Lynn Bakken, Jim** and **Barbara Banks, Pamela Batton, Dawn Baudek-Smith, Jeff Birek, Susan Blansett, Deb Bogar, Karl Brummert, Dale Campau, Shelley Conger, Carol Cwiklinski, Martha Delporte, Meredith Denton-Hedrick, Dave** and **Mariane Erickson, Karen** and **Mike Fernandez, Patti Galli, Chris Gearhart, Vicky Hamilton, Stephen Hasley, Dave Hill, Krista Hinman, Linda Hodges, Kathy Holland, Edward Imatani, Edie Israel, Ben Jacques, Debbie James, Cyndy Johnson, Darcy Juday, Joey Kellner, Nick Komar, Shmuel "Sammy" Korengut, Kerrie Lagon, Jane Maczuzak, Mark** and **Senja Meiklejohn, Mary Metzger, Marissa Ortega-Welch, Janet Peters, Courtney Rella, Crystal Reser, Emma Riley, Gary Rossmiller, Karen Rutledge, Steve Ryder, Nanette Shorter, Steve Small, Barbara Sobhani, Pamela StClair, Janine Taurchini, Kate Teneyck, Candace Tomlinson, Angela Trnka, Natalie Vande Vuss, Lila Varel,** and **Roxanne Warner.**

Lead counter Riley is scheduled to speak about this year's effort at DFO's final monthly evening program on Nov. 28. For more details, see the article on fall programs on page 5 of this issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

April hawk watchers at Dino Ridge
Marissa Ortega-Welch

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	$	_____
Hawk Watch donation (DFO community science)	$	_____
Total	$	_____

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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 58 | ISSUE 09 | SEPTEMBER 2022 DFOBIRDS.ORG

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Up close with DFO's ace bird pursuer

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FIELD TRIPPING

2 midsummer outings from Plains to Summit

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH »

Common Grackle

John Breitsch

Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge Adams County

ON THE COVER

John Breitsch, a nuclear pharmacy tech by night, first worked overnights in his 20s, moved to Colorado in his 30s, became a birder at 40, and led his first DFO trip just after 50. He has loved wildlife since before he can remember. A birding friend calls him "Emperor of First Creek."

Common Grackle: Uncommon looker . . . and sometime pest

The calendar says nesting time is just about over in our part of the world. But that parent-and-young photo on the cover of this issue of *The Lark Bunting* has an unseasonal timelessness, doesn't it?

For the record, our cover photographer this month, DFO trip leader **John Breitsch** of Denver, found this adult-juvenile pair of Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quisculaon*) on the Fourth of July in 2021 at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. That's smack in the peak-middle of this striking blackbird's breeding season at the Adams County preserve.

Breitsch, something of a savant at working seldom-visited corners, interesting edges and new niches in the Denver aviatropolis, spotted this pair while walking the Rocky Mountain Greenway Trail along the far south side of the Arsenal.

If that trail sounds unfamiliar, it's the second-longest footpath in the refuge (4.8 miles). It's also the far southeast leg of what optimistic conservationists hope will someday be a continuous trail of the same name linking the Arsenal, Two Ponds NWR in Arvada, Rocky Flats NWR near Golden and even Rocky Mountain NP.

"The trail was very new at the time, and I was exploring it a lot that year," John says. "I was on a morning walk, of course (he works overnights), and the birds were just off the path. It was a pretty darn good walk that also had Northern Mockingbird and Cassin's, Grasshopper, Vesper, and Lark sparrows, and some other photogenic birds."

With fierce yellow eyes and an iridescent blue-bronze gloss across its underlying inkiness, the Common Grackle is certainly a looker. But it is also reviled by some as ugly, noisy and a destructive pest (especially to field crops). The species comes to Colorado (everywhere except the far southwest corner) in spring and summer to breed and rear young. Then it returns to the East and South for the rest of the year, almost entirely inside the continental US.

Common Grackles are adaptable foragers and mostly omnivorous (fish, fruit, acorns, mice, insects, garbage), and they have been known to raid other birds' nests and even kill and eat adult birds.

Not-quite-fun fact: The species rates "near threatened" conservation status, even though its numbers have been estimated as high as 69 million birds. How so? Because of lethal control measures against it as a serious agricultural pest in the eastern US. Interestingly, numbers have risen in the West, where we see grackles in fields, open spaces, parks and at feeders.

This year, the usual spring flock of about three dozen birds returned to Denver City Park and Denver Zoo next door (where some appear to nest near the elephants). They are one of innumerable Front Range spots where small groups breed. Memorable moment: A partly leucistic adult, a splashy mix of black and white and blue, was seen pecking at a crayfish on the shore of Duck Lake in May.

— Patrick O'Driscoll

Patrick O'Driscoll, a DFO member since 2014, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads field trips (his patch is Denver City Park) and has been editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fear and (self-)loathing in our warming world

Susan Blansett
DANGER: Contents may be flammable.

This will not be a happy column. (Hopeful, perhaps? Get back to me at the bottom.) As I considered what to write about this month, the news kept invading my thoughts. I learned a new word: *pyrocumulonimbus*, the "fire-breathing dragon of clouds" that created its own weather in a 55,000-acre California wildfire with no end in sight. Then climate-related flash flooding devastated St. Louis and killed at least 37 people in Kentucky.

Meanwhile, in eastern Colorado, two reservoirs of major importance to birds will soon be dry, and the state lifted fishing limits so anglers can salvage all the fish that otherwise will die. And we are still reeling, three years later, from that sobering report in the journal *Science* that 3 billion birds have been lost since 1970 to largely human-triggered changes in nature that are only exacerbated by human-caused global warming.

Personally, I've shifted from climate concern to the brink of climate panic. Yes, me — the one who always considered herself a conservationist, to the point that an ex-colleague dubbed me "Earth Muffin" for my "green" enthusiasm. I bought carbon offsets for my air travel on business. "I'll do what I can," I told myself, composting food waste, recycling, buying TP made of sustainably grown bamboo, and never using chemical pesticides in my bird-friendly garden.

Lately, I've been slipping. When I looked in the virtual mirror the other day, my efforts seemed rather shallow. In just the past couple of weeks, here's how I haven't been helping the environment:

- Still buying way too many single-use plastics, many of which don't get recycled, perhaps some even ending up in that "garbage patch" flotilla of plastic in the Pacific

- Still driving my gasoline-powered car to the grocery store 3 blocks away to buy non-organic meats and farm-raised salmon, too often forgetting to bring my reusable bags

- Driving solo, on selfish impulse, to the San Luis Valley to add Yellow Rail to my life list. A rather wasteful trip (I DID have a great time) for a species that, for all we know, is in Colorado at least partly because its normal habitat is compromised by climate change

- On Aug. 1, still driving myself from Golden to work downtown on the first of 30 days of FREE RTD rides across metro Denver. "More convenient," I admitted.

All right . . . enough self-flagellation. I tell myself that everything in life has trade-offs, right? Nationally, Colorado state and local governments and businesses are often seen as models in shifting to clean energy, and doing so inclusively. My day job in workforce development is to help energy employers find the qualified workers they need to get Colorado energy use to 100 percent renewable by 2040.

But it's a fact that manufacturing solar panels and battery storage requires lithium, zinc, and other minerals not always mined sustainably. Transmitting renewable energy from wind farms and solar fields to the grid and its customers has tradeoffs, too. See **Steve Ryder**'s article on page 22 of this newsletter about the Power Pathway project on Colorado's Eastern Plains. The better of two or more choices — Cleaner juice? Dirtier air? And what about the birds? — isn't always obvious. Even when it is, we sometimes still choose poorly out of convenience (or, more understandably, out of plain economics).

Here's what I realized at the bottom of my exercise in self-loathing: I have plenty of "small-g" guilt for choices I've made so far. But maybe my error has been in looking at green choice as having to "give things up." I need to remember how good it feels when I make better choices. Organizational wonks call this "appreciative inquiry" — looking for what we're doing right, and doing more of it, rather than focusing on what needs fixing.

When I do take the light rail, or remember my reusable bags, I do feel happier. It's self-reinforcing: The less "harm" I do,

Continued on page 4

FROM THE PRESIDENT *cont from page 3*

the better I feel. Pardon me if this is preachy. Goodness knows, many of you are far more advanced at this than I am.

So, here's my invitation: Join me in whatever way works for you to make better choices about the sustainable things that are in our control. The fact is, in spite of everything dark and gloomy just now, climate scientists are *still* telling us there is time to make the right choices — globally, nationally, locally and personally. There will still be wildfires, crazy weather, and warming, rising seas. We may be late — but not too late yet to turn things around.

Let's do it together for future generations . . . and, of course, for the birds we love!

— Susan

Susan Blansett, club president since 2021, has volunteered in numerous committee roles and as an officer since joining the DFO Board in 2016. She became a field trip leader this year. Susan works for the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

Merch up at DFO's Zazzle store

Got merch? You can order a variety of items with the colorful new Denver Field Ornithologists logo — T-shirts, caps, water bottles and more — at the new "Official DFO Shop" on Zazzle, a print-on-demand service. Items come in tons of colors and sizes up to 2XL. Proceeds will help support DFO projects like Hawk Watch, the Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund, and general club operations.

To visit the shop, click here: https://www.zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop

Don't see any item you'd like with the new DFO "brand"? Contact DFO Membership chair **Sue Summers** (summerssue@hotmail.com) or VP **Sharon Tinianow** (sharontinianow@gmail.com) with your requests and ideas for different ones.

If you do order something, send *The Lark Bunting* a selfie with your new DFO-themed purchase so we can share! Submit photos to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

The Lark Bunting newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists is published monthly except for joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submit original articles to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. Editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any such materials.

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DFO NEWS

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share them: club news, Colorado birding newsbits, personal eBird milestones, quick tales from the trail, birding life (and life bird!) events, etc. Send your items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor* ***Patrick O'Driscoll*** *at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

Cassia Crossbills
Dale Pate

RARE CROSSBILL AT DFO NESTING AREA IS CLUB'S 407TH SPECIES

In an unexpectedly busy month for Colorado rarities, one of July's biggest turned up in a Summit County location DFO helped create more than 50 years ago: Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area, in the North Rock Creek drainage northwest of Silverthorne. *(See related story on page 29 of this issue.)* The Cassia Crossbill, a species normally found only inside 27 square miles of lodgepole pines in isolated southern Idaho, was detected in the nesting area in mid-July, when Boulder County birder **Eric DiFonso** recorded the birds' calls. When a DFO field trip organized to seek the rarity arrived on July 26, participants re-found the rarity in the lodgepole treetops.

Not only was the sighting the 407th species on DFO's own Colorado species checklist on eBird, it was a "lifer" for most of those on the trip, including leader **David Suddjian**, the club's field trip chair. This find also is only the second record of Cassia Crossbill in Colorado.

AUDUBON RENAMES CHATFIELD NATURE CENTER FOR KINGERYS

The longest-serving member of Denver Field Ornithologists, **Hugh Kingery** (since 1953), and his wife and partner in all things Colorado birding, **Urling Kingery**, were honored July 19 with the renaming of Denver Audubon's Chatfield nature center in Jefferson County. About 100 fellow birders, friends and family gathered in the shade of the center's cottonwoods to celebrate its rechristening as the Kingery Nature Center, where the southernmost reach of Chatfield SP and the opening of Waterton Canyon meet. With the Kingerys' daughters and families (including three grandchildren) on hand, Denver Audubon celebrated Colorado's longtime birding power couple with a recitation of some of their innumerable accomplishments:

Colorado Master Birder program founders, Denver Audubon, the spring, fall and Urban Denver Christmas Bird Counts, Walk the Wetlands and other field trips (usually ending with Urling's incomparable brownies), the founding of Colorado Field Ornithologists, refinement of the Colorado Rare Bird Alert, *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas* . . . the list goes on and on. Both Kingerys made brief remarks to spare attendees more

Kingerys at Audubon nature center
Patrick O'Driscoll

exposure to mid-90s heat. "Thank you for coming out for today's HOT fun," cracked Hugh, who also signed a few copies of his 15-year-old *Birding Colorado* field guide, brought by faithful fans. Near the end, master birder and Willie Nelson pretender **Bob Santangelo** serenaded them with an audience sing-along to rewritten lyrics, *Mammas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Birders*. Congratulations to Hugh and Urling from your vast flock of Colorado birder-babies!

Continued on page 6

HOW THEY SEE US: THE YELLOW RAIL MOB

July's sensational detection of the *tick-tick-tick-tick* call of a male Yellow Rail (and maybe two) at Monte Vista NWR in southern Colorado sent flocks of birders from across the state and beyond to the San Luis Valley for a listen. A super-rarity not identified in Colorado for more than a century, the find by Boulder County birder **Eric DiFonso** drew more than just birders. **Michael Booth**, a reporter from *The Colorado Sun*, a Denver-based digital newspaper, got wind of the commotion and went looking for the rest of the story. The result was this enjoyable "bird nerd alert" feature July 18 on DiFonso's discovery and the subsequent stakeout. Some readers may quibble with the headline word "spotted" when the famously elusive species was only heard, not seen, during the first week or so on its dawn and dusk meanderings through impenetrable bullrushes. Read the story at https://coloradosun.com/2022/07/18/rare-yellow-rail-bird-spotted-colorado/

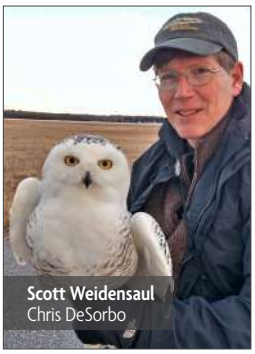
BIRDS OF ANCIENT SOUTHWEST: VIDEO SERIES, KEEPSAKE MAGAZINE

Last fall, *The Lark Bunting* previewed a 2021-22 series of eight free webinars about the role of birds in the lives, culture and art of the Southwest's Ancestral Puebloan peoples. From birds' importance at Chaco Canyon to the keeping of Wild Turkeys for both sustenance and ceremony, this *Archaeology Southwest* series drew monthly audiences via Zoom and led to the current and elegant 64-page double issue of its quarterly journal. Now the hour-long recordings are available for free viewing in *Archaeology Southwest*'s video archive at https://www.archaeologysouthwest.org/videos/. Click on "Any Type" and go to the "Archaeology Café" link in the dropdown menu. The first eight results are the "Birds of the Southwest" webinar selections.

And if the archaeology of birds fascinates you, that colorful "Revisiting Birds in the Southwest" issue of the organization's magazine is a keeper. It's available in both glossy, thick-stock magazine format and PDF for $10 — or free with membership in Archaeology Southwest.

COLORADO WATER MEASURES IN 2022 FOR PEOPLE AND BIRDS

Audubon Rockies, the regional office for the national organization's work in CO, UT and WY, pulled together a roundup in June of "wins for water" that the Colorado Legislature passed in its recently completed 2022 session. It singled out several notable actions for water capacity, watersheds and new water projects in Colorado, including funds to restore vital lands damaged by wildfires and incentives to replace non-native turf grass with water-wise and native landscaping. Read more about it in this news update, and also on Audubon Rockies' blog.


Scott Weidensaul
Chris DeSorbo

WEIDENSAUL: GRASSLAND BIRDS VICTIMS OF "NEONIC" PESTICIDES?

The cause-and-effect of DDT's deadliness to birds was easy to document after raptor populations plummeted in the 1960s. The subsequent anti-DDT uproar led to the banning of the pesticide in 1972. Since the 1990s, the rise of another family of insecticides — neonicotinoids, now the most widely used in the world — has corresponded with a decline in America's grasslands bird species by more than half. Although cause-and-effect evidence is not as clearly cut, the prominent bird writer, researcher and migration expert, **Scott Weidensaul**, makes a persuasive argument in an extensive investigation published in the summer issue of Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Living Bird* magazine and posted on the lab's *All About Birds* website.

Weidensaul, who entertained a DFO audience with an evening program on bird migration last March, notes that the substance isn't just applied to crops; it also is coated onto the surface of crop seed before planting (and sometimes spilled above ground in the planting process). This use isn't regulated, owing to a loophole in federal regulation. Neonics also are in a number of home and yard products.

You can judge for yourself by reading Weidensaul's article on the *All About Birds* website at this link: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/neonic-nation-is-widespread-pesticide-use-connected-to-grassland-bird-declines

Nathan Pieplow
CU Boulder

The Best Bird Songs You've Never Heard

Nathan Pieplow
Monday, August 22
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Over the years, we have come to expect the unexpected when birdsong authority and veteran Colorado birder **Nathan Pieplow**'s name is on the program. The intriguing title for his Aug. 22 DFO evening presentation guarantees a trip somewhere most of us have never been.

"What if I told you," Pieplow asks, "that cormorants, vultures, and House Sparrows are some of the most accomplished avian singers in North America?"

OK, we're listening . . .

"Maybe you've never heard them before," he continues. "Or maybe you've never heard them quite this way. This presentation will delve into the surprising world of bird songs that are hidden, underappreciated, and sometimes flat-out denied to exist."

One of Colorado's foremost birders, Boulder-based Pieplow is a former editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists' *Colorado Birds* quarterly journal and the author of the two volumes of the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds* for both western and eastern North America. He was the go-to authority when an ultra-rare Yellow Rail was detected (and recorded) in July at Monte Vista NWR.

A South Dakota native, Pieplow grew up fascinated by birds and has been an intense student of bird sounds for 18 years. He is also an author of the Colorado Birding Trail website. His day job is as an assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder.

To register for this free Aug. 22 Zoom presentation, click this registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_xv36fugcTweyGmLJhTzxMQ

You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminder about connecting to Pieplow's program.

Double-crested Cormorant
Jim Esten

Continued on page 8

Ted Floyd
Abby Santurbane

Letting Go: Birding and Nature Study in the Age of Zoomers and Alphas

Ted Floyd
September 26
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Attention Gen X and Baby Boom birders: Your moment of 21st century birding Zen is at hand. Thus will sayeth the generational prophet, birding seer and prolific author **Ted Floyd** in a most provocative evening presentation on Sept. 26.

Floyd, the Lafayette-based, longtime editor of American Birding Association's award-winning *Birding* magazine, will address "the proverbial peaceful transfer of power to the next generation, or generations, of advocates for birds and nature and the whole world." Translation: Get read to "step aside and get out of the way," birding elders. But he adds, with a twist, that younger generations "can't get there without 'us.' Not quite yet."

Floyd, author of five books ("with several more on the way"), most recently *How to Know the Birds*, will talk about the birding culture of our youngest cohorts. From Z to A, Floyd means members of Generation Z (also known as Zoomers) and their younger siblings (Alphas). He promises a "spirited and respectful" session about passing the torch without burning anyone.

"The 'standard model' for our age is welcomeness and inclusivity," Floyd says. "But what if the methods and mores of Gen X and Boomer birders are incompatible with those of Alpha and Zoomer birders? What if 'their' aspiration and ideals are ill-served by 'ours'?" One way forward, he suggests, is for birding elders to "let go. Binoculars and field guides, waking up early and joining bird clubs, even field ID and keeping a list — maybe birding doesn't have to be about any of that" in the world Zoomers and Alphas are poised to inherit.

"Definitely not another 'How to Use eBird' or 'Shorebirds Made Simple' presentation!" Floyd wisecracked in an advance note about his talk.

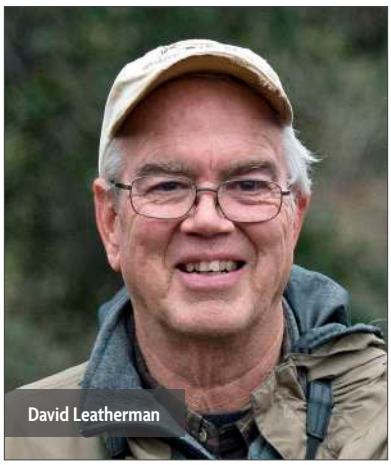
The author of more than 200 popular articles, technical papers and book chapters on birds and nature, Floyd is especially interested in analyzing bird vocalizations, interpreting birds and nature for children and beginners, and applying new media and technologies to the appreciation of nature.

To register for this free Sept. 26 Zoom presentation, click this registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_zm7ma0CIRXW_B6bu-vGNBw

You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Floyd's program as the date approaches.

Continued on page 9


David Leatherman

To register for this free Oct. 24 Zoom presentation, click this registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_kCjMM8bCTxy7h9hNJFvdsg

You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Leatherman's presentation as the date approaches.

Life History of the Best Tree in Our World

David Leatherman
October 24
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

When **David Leatherman** — curious birder, expert bugman, exacting photographer and deft wordsmith — told us the subject of his Oct. 24 DFO evening presentation, he described it with this riddle:

"They smell like vanilla, sport dimples in their bark, feed pine beetles, house Pygmy Nuthatches, inspired **Albert Bierstadt**, frame the Front Range, fuel ferocious fires and comfort squirrels with tufted ears."

They are Ponderosa pines, Leatherman continued, "the best tree in our world." Sign up for his free Zoom presentation for what's sure to be an entertaining defense. His talk will "celebrate the natural history of this wonderful tree, featuring the diverse birdlife among its boughs."

A veteran of numerous previous DFO presentations, Leatherman served more than three decades as the forest entomologist for the Colorado State Forest Service (1974-2005). Out of his deep background in insects that draw birds into Colorado's forests, Leatherman has seen 460 avian species in the state (and had a part in finding four first state record birds). That's an astounding 89.3 percent of the 515 species ever recorded in Colorado.

Leatherman is probably more famous in Colorado for his meticulous, passionate, 35 years of figuring out what birds here eat. Since 2010, he has answered that in his widely read "The Hungry Bird" column in *Colorado Birds*, the quarterly journal of Colorado Field Ornithologists. Between columns, Leatherman regularly regales readers of CFO's COBirds email list-serv with accounts of his frequent explorations (sometimes with photos of nearly microscopic creepy-crawlies) into what notable birds are eating.

Born in 1949 and raised in the shadow of Ohio State University's football stadium, he was interested in nature since childhood. He earned his bachelor's degree in biology from Marietta (OH) College and master's in forestry from Duke University. Father of three sons (four grandchildren), he counts the Blackburnian Warbler as his favorite bird. ("Right up there are crossbills, shrikes, Canyon Wren, vireos, pelagic species, and Merlin," he adds.) He also thinks Odell's 90 Shilling Ale "should be the official state microbrew."

"And if I could just find a cabin and bottle of whiskey," Leatherman adds, he plans to write a book about his more than 2,000 birds-and-bugs visits to Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins, his home patch. Working title: *Life Among the Headstones*.

Continued on page 10

Emma Riley and Northern Harrier

Hawk Watch 2022

Emma Riley
Monday, November 28
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

Emma Riley was the full-time hawk counter and daily on-site coordinator during the two-month-plus spring 2022 season of DFO's Hawk Watch program. She will speak about national Hawk Watch efforts — where they are and why they matter — and present an update on the results and trends for Hawk Watch this year on Dinosaur Ridge.

Look for more details about this free Zoom presentation and a link for registration in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Ferruginous Hawk
Diane Roberts

BIRDING WORKSHOPS

DFO's Better Birding Skills workshops return

Sharon Tinianow

Disrupted two years ago by the COVID-19 pandemic, DFO's popular Better Birding Skills (BBS) workshops are back now by popular demand.

For our first new BBS session in September, **Gregg Goodrich**, field trip leader and birding app wiz, will show and tell about how best to use the Merlin Bird ID tool to identify birds in the field and contribute to eBird's growing database of bird songs and sounds. *(See related story on the next page.)* You may have seen the similar August 2020 workshop Gregg and **Chuck Hundertmark** presented on using eBird. (If you missed it, you can watch it at https://archive.org/embed/dfo-2020-08&autoplay=1.)

On deck for October is a raptor ID BBS workshop led by DFO's Hawk Watch community science team. More details will follow in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*. And for the coming year, 2023, DFO's BBS committee has begun planning a series of workshops on Colorado habitats and the birds that use them. Look for more about that in a future issue of the newsletter, too.

All those are in addition to DFO's current "Bird Bombs" series of half-hour Zoom quick studies in seasonal bird ID, led by **David Suddjian**, DFO's Field Trip chair. *(See related story on page 13 of this issue.)*

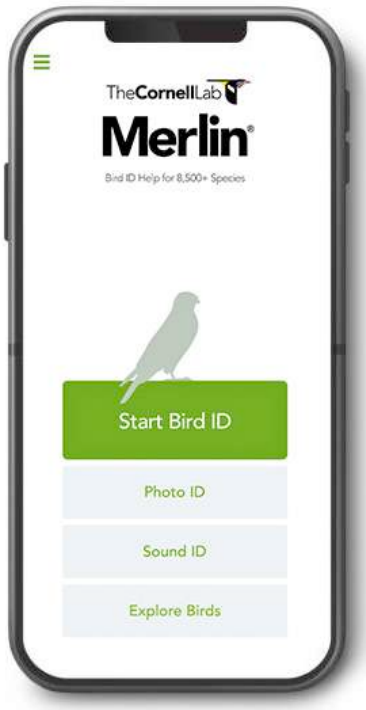
The format for past BBS workshops was a classroom session in person followed by a group trip into the field. When the pandemic made in-person gatherings impossible, the workshops went on hiatus. As our BBS program returns, DFO plans a hybrid approach. We'll use Zoom webinar technology for classroom sessions, including what's learned in class to prepare for work out in the field as before. Another upgrade: More people can participate via Zoom.

The BBS workshops planned for debut in early 2023 aim to help birders more accurately ID species in the field by developing a broader knowledge of habitat characteristics in a given place and the habitat needs of birds in it. Another target is the broadening of everyone's knowledge of Colorado's ecosystems, which can help in planning field excursions.

In fact, if you have deep knowledge of one or more of the habitats important to birds in Colorado and are comfortable presenting via Zoom, the BBS Committee could use your help. It's looking for help developing learning segments on several important Colorado bird habitats and presenting sessions on them via Zoom.

The committee will support developers and presenters of these learning modules with suggested lesson plans and access to maps, photographs and other resources. We will work together through autumn to prepare this series. Come join us! For more details, contact **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com.

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, began birding in an ornithology class in college. Now DFO vice president and previously editor of *The Lark Bunting*, she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.



BIRDING WORKSHOPS

Merlin Bird ID? Free Sept. 6 Zoom workshop!

Gregg Goodrich

The Merlin Bird ID app for smartphones has many great features. Have you downloaded it and put it to use yet? It's free!

Every birder with a smartphone should have this indispensable field aid. Created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Merlin is really four birding coaches in one: Field guide, bird photo ID assistant (added in 2017), sound ID assistant (2021), and bird ID suggestion generator based on the descriptions (size, color, behavior) that you provide to Merlin from your location in the field (original app, launched in 2014).

If you've never used this amazing free tool, or if you use Merlin only in a rudimentary way and haven't explored all its features, join us on **Tuesday, Sept. 6 at 7 p.m. MDT** for a DFO Better Birding Skills Workshop, *Merlin Bird ID and How to Use It*. This webinar via Zoom will run about 30 minutes, with time after for Q&A. I will lead the full session from my phone, explaining and showing all the cool functions and features of this amazing app.

I don't know the official reason it's called "Merlin," but Cornell does describe the app's original Q&A identification function as the Bird ID *Wizard*. And I do find it almost magical how the app can render such accurate bird ID suggestions merely from a user's description answers, a photo of the bird, or a recording of sounds it makes in the field.

Magical, too, is how Cornell has managed to package together four such powerful birding aids. Individually, each of them could be a rich birding apps on its own. All are driven by the power and reach of the vast eBird database, from species location to sound and photography. The Sound ID feature, introduced just last year, has become an instant hit for many birders.

About the "bird guide" part: Many Merlin users may not realize the app includes a full-featured birding field guide, with individual species photos, maps, sound recordings and writeups like you'd read in a conventional guide.

You can also customize Merlin's "Explore Birds" feature on the fly to survey species most likely to be found for a specific date and location. And you can tell Merlin to exclude your own eBird "life birds" from its "explore" search so that you will in effect be targeting only new "lifers" at a location. (Merlin already contains and supports more than 8,500 species globally and continues to grow all the time.)

So, join us on Sept. 6 and learn how to use and do all of these and more. In addition to Merlin Bird ID, I will also review how to upload photos and recordings to your eBird checklists.

To register, visit: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_FTEAmfL6T_Gg738Ynk7hMA

Gregg Goodrich, a birder for about two decades, joined DFO in 2015 and has led field trips and served on the Field Trip Committee. A retired computer network analyst, he also enjoys bicycling and has climbed all 58 of Colorado's 14ers.

BIRD BOMBS *Helpful Bursts of ID Info*

Bird Bombs away! 3 more workshops to drop via Zoom

DFO's "Bird Bombs" are the bomb.

Our new-in-2022 series of quick (about half an hour), intensive and free bursts of bird identification tips has drawn between 70 and 100 registrations for each of the first five sessions since April. (Zoom video recordings of all five are viewable on the DFO website's "Past Programs" page at https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx.)

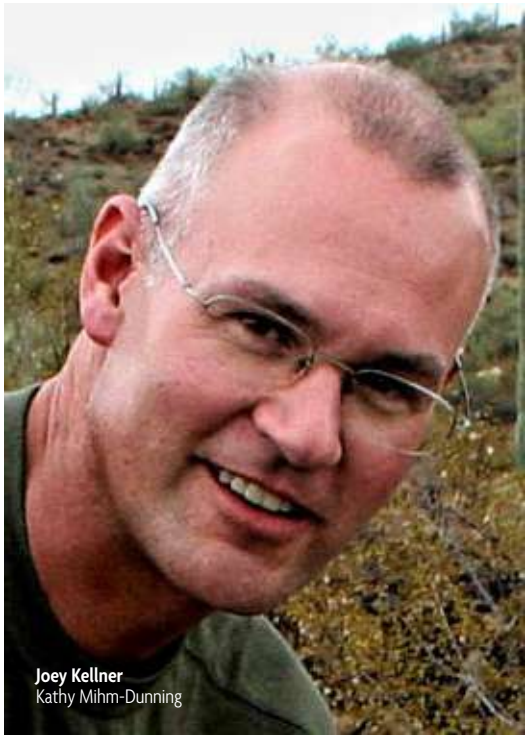
Two more summer *Bird Bombs* focused on seasonal bird ID are set to drop in August and September, and the first autumn session isn't far behind. To the right are details and registration links for all three. All times are MDT.

Thursday, Aug. 18, 7 p.m.
The Little Pipers
Shorebird "peeps" species in genus *Calidris*
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_n-Vh8_QmQSKUigMqL4CChQ

Thursday, Sept. 8, 7 p.m.
Fall For Sparrows
5 Autumn visitors: White-crowned, American Tree, Spizellas
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_rwgrz2TvQX6p6xhE8UeUpA

Thursday, Oct 13, 7 p.m.
Looking at Loons
Fall and winter visitors
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_7imNtwMZSVqOfpBzR8GR5w

White-crowned Sparrow
Jim Esten



Joey Kellner
Kathy Mihm-Dunning

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:
Up close with longtime trip leader Joey Kellner

*Editor's note: **In the Scope** is a series of Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, and other volunteers and members who participate in the life of our club. This month's subject is field trip leader **Joey Kellner**, Denver Christmas Bird Count compiler and 2012 recipient of the Ptarmigan Award, DFO's highest honor. Your feedback and nominations for IN THE SCOPE are welcome — email* The Lark Bunting *at patodrisk@gmail.com*

Name:	**Joey Kellner**
Age:	**58**
Home city:	**Littleton**
Occupation:	**Aerospace industry (retired)**

How/when/where I became a birder?

Birds always interested me as a small child in the Chicago area, but I didn't start feeding them in the backyard until the family moved to Colorado (Lakewood) when I was 9 years old. A few years later, our biology teacher at Lakewood HS dedicated two weeks of study to birds. We learned about bird biology and behavior, and we had to be able to identify 60 species by sight. Studying pictures of the birds we had to learn, I remember seeing Long-billed Curlew, American Avocet, and what seemed like LOTS of swallows and orioles. I remember thinking, "Yeah, right — like I'm going to see *these* birds in Colorado! In the tropics, maybe, or some other exotic place." After passing the class, I put all that bird info into long-term mental storage. Then one day in college, I needed a study break and took a hike up Mount Falcon. Sitting at a picnic table, I heard wings flapping around my head. A small bird landed on the table. We looked at each other intently. "I KNOW you," I said to myself. "You're a Mountain Chickadee!" THAT is when I became a birder. I began noticing the natural world around me and trying to spot and ID more birds. I even got my new girlfriend, **Brenda**, into it. We planned dates around birding trips to Barr Lake, Mount Falcon and other birdy spots. A few months later, Brenda took the same two-week bird biology unit from the same Lakewood HS teacher. My birding girlfriend became my wife of 33 years and counting. Brenda and I still keep in touch with that biology teacher, exchanging Christmas cards every year.

When/why I joined DFO?

When learning birds on our own while dating, Brenda and I saw groups of birders on occasion at Barr Lake and found out they were from Denver Field Ornithologists. That last word, *ornithologists*, sounded pretty intimidating, but we would learn that the "field" part is just as important. Once at Barr Lake, Brenda found a Eurasian Widgeon (now spelled *Wigeon*). When we listed it on the "sightings board" for birds and wildlife back at the nature center, the docent said we should report it more widely because it was a rarity. She gave us a phone number to leave a message about our find. This was our introduction to Colorado's phone-based "Rare Bird Alert" and its tie-in with DFO. That's when we joined the club.

First DFO trip I went on?

After joining DFO, it took many months before we got up the nerve to actually participate on a field trip. We had birded Chatfield SP a number of times and would regularly compare our checklists there with those from DFO trips, which were

Continued on page 15

published in *The Lark Bunting* each month back before the internet and eBird. After noticing that the DFO checklists always had more species we hadn't seen there, it was finally time to take the plunge. That first DFO trip was in familiar waters: a Fall Bird Count outing at Chatfield SP, led by **Jack Reddall**, an ex-Marine with extensive birding knowledge. Jack took us to places in the park that Brenda and I had never visited. He also showed us HOW to bird. There were a number of good sightings that day, but the one I remember most was a black-headed bird, a gull, on the mudflats at the mouth of Plum Creek. When Jack asked if anyone knew what species it was, somebody said, "Franklin's Gull." Jack replied, "No, the bird is an adult Sabine's Gull!" In the early 1980s, the species was a genuine rarity in Colorado; few people here knew how to identify one. Jack's knowledge of birds was amazing and he would become my birding mentor. He taught me how to look for birds, and how to document rare birds. When I gave him some of my submissions of bird sightings to the Colorado Bird Records Committee and asked him to "red-line" and comment on them, boy, DID HE EVER! I got pages back covered with comments handwritten in red ink, and whole sections struck out. But . . . I certainly learned how to document a rare bird! Incidentally, Jack Reddall was editor of this newsletter for many years. He literally typed it up every month on his old typewriter.

Joey Kellner in the field
Kathy Mihm-Dunning

How/why I became a trip leader?

After a few years, Jack encouraged me to start leading trips. Once again, Chatfield was the logical first location since I had birded it so much. With trepidation (and Jack there as a fail-safe) I led my first trip. As I led more of them, I learned so much more than I did as a participant. Those on trips ask questions from start to finish, and I realized I really needed to up my game so I could answer them.

Favorite DFO field trip destination and why?

One of my favorites to lead is an early fall trip to Prewitt Reservoir in Washington and Logan counties out on Colorado's northeastern plains. There are always early autumn migrants around, from land birds to waterbirds to shorebirds; usually a few are really unusual, never seen before by many participants. It's a great learning trip for warblers in fall plumage and shorebirds in juvenal plumage (first true feathers).

Best DFO field trip ever?

That would be a trip to Chatfield (of course!) on April 30, 1989. It was cold and overcast, and it snowed until late morning. Terrible conditions, right? Yes, but we saw 88 species, a Chatfield fallout! Vermilion Flycatcher! Peregrine Falcon! (A genuine rarity back then.) Several swallow species by the thousands, 195 Water Pipits (now called American Pipit), a couple of hundred Yellow-rumped Warblers, and 15 species of shorebirds! There were sparrows and pipits all over the road, an open corridor of warm pavement surrounded by snow-covered grasslands.

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My field trip philosophy?

Show by example: How to bird, where to look, what to listen for. Thankfully, birds are everywhere. So I encourage all birders to get out on any trips, not just mine, with experienced and knowledgeable DFO leaders. Then, after the trip, go out on your own and test the skills and knowledge you learned. Work on the bird IDs that challenge you, and then . . . take another DFO trip and ask lots more questions. The BEST way to learn birds quickly is to go birding with better birders, then practice your skills on your own.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

ANYWHERE I haven't been: Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Ecuador, etc.

The next trip I'm leading?

With August now upon us, I will lead my annual autumn trip to Prewitt and Jackson reservoirs in Washington, Logan and Morgan counties on Aug. 28. The numbers and variety of migrant shorebirds should not disappoint — and there is ALWAYS the chance for interesting fall land bird migrants, too.

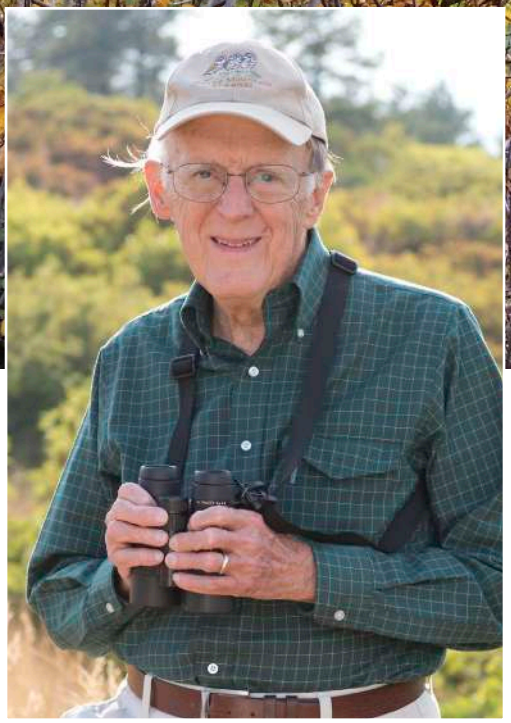
Your advice for beginning or intermediate birders?

Beginners? Once you know the common, everyday birds of your area or "patch," leave your field guide in the car and carry a small notebook and pencil, Any bird ID you aren't sure of, take lots of notes — about the head, face, back, wings, underparts, tail. When you get back, look up birds in the field guide that fit your note details. If your notes lack enough detail for an ID, learn what field marks you should have looked for. That will make you a better observer next time.

Intermediates? You already know the common birds and many of the not-so-common, so now branch out. Many species unusual or rare for your local patch are common further afield. Go there: Get out to more distant locations and see. What you find may someday show up in your home area. If you already bird regularly around Colorado, good for you. Now, try a neighboring state. Birds there have wings, too, and they could show up here. Finding rare birds is not just luck. "Luck" or "chance" favors the prepared mind. Never stop learning!

Joey with gopher snake in Arizona
Kathy Mihm-Dunning

Lynn in aspens near Ouray, 2016
Liz Willcockson



Lynn in 2015 (Povy Kendal Atchison)

IN MEMORIAM

Lynn Willcockson (1935-2022): Kind, quiet soul who led DFO through a key evolution

Patrick O'Driscoll

Lynn B. Willcockson, a decades-long DFO member and forefather who helped guide the Colorado Bird Club's transformation into Denver Field Ornithologists nearly 60 years ago, died unexpectedly in June. He would have turned 87 in late August.

Active and vital into his 80s, Willcockson succumbed on June 16 to complications of serious injuries from a May 24 hit-and-run wreck not far from his southeast Denver home. Lynn and his wife of nearly 60 years, **Liz**, were returning from a therapy appointment when the driver of a stolen car crashed into their vehicle.

Lynn, who had been in physical therapy for dementia, suffered broken ribs and bleeding on the brain in the collision. After two weeks in the hospital, he was released June 8 to skilled nursing and hospice care. He died peacefully eight days later.

In an outpouring of tributes, Willcockson's fellow birders, friends and family remembered him as a kind, quiet soul and a tireless volunteer with two deep passions: the historic downtown Denver church where he worshiped for six decades (and met his wife), and the absolute joy of birding. Besides filling leadership, field trip and volunteer roles in DFO and other Colorado birding endeavors, Willcockson created the state's dial-in Rare Bird Alert decades before email and eBird would fill that vital role.

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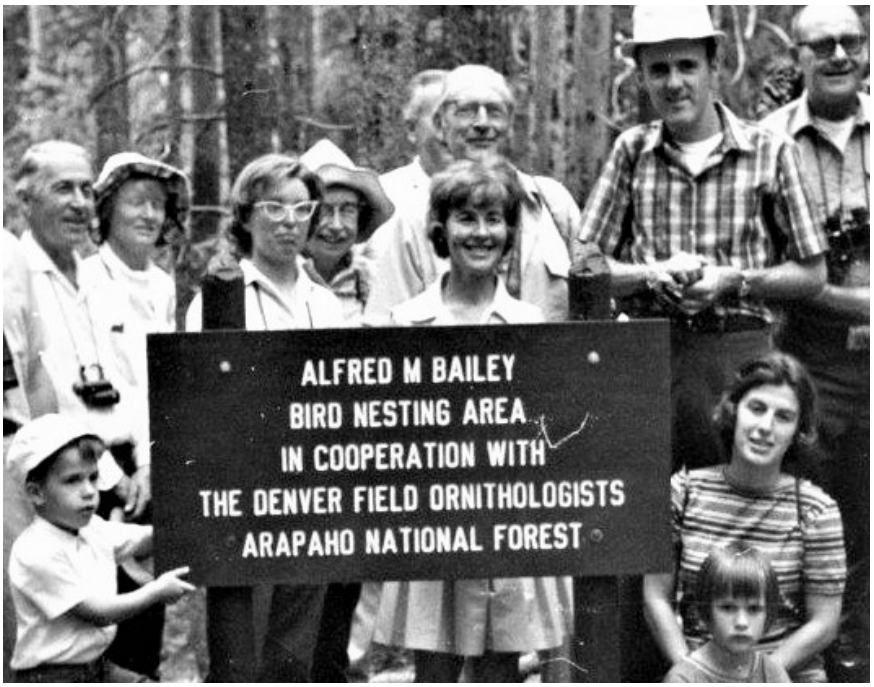
LYNN WILLCOCKSON *cont from page 17*

"Of course, birding was his first love . . . It was just a lifelong hobby for him," wife Liz said in an interview a couple of weeks after Lynn's death. "And as a consequence, our kids appreciate those things more." Daughter **Barb Archer** and son **Brett Willcockson** grew up with his love of the outdoors.

Liz, at the wheel when their car was hit, suffered bruises but recovered not long after, only to contract COVID-19 the day after her husband's passing. Within days, she was also diagnosed with cardiac artery blockages that would require two hospital procedures in June and July to remedy successfully.



Lynn (white hat, upper right) in 1971 with wife Liz, daughter Barb (bottom right) and son Brett (bottom left) (DMNS archive)

Willcockson was the second-longest serving member of DFO, having joined what was then the Colorado Bird Club in 1960-61, shortly after moving to Denver from his native Iowa. Lynn was born in 1935, the same year the club was founded. Only **Hugh Kingery** (1953), the prominent and ageless Colorado birding authority, has been a member longer.

BIRDS AND CHURCH — IN THAT ORDER

In a thank-you note to DFO President **Susan Blansett** for her condolences from the club, Lynn and Liz's daughter Barb noted: "Anyone associated with DFO has always been considered 'family' in our household for as long as I can remember." As a child, Archer accompanied her dad on Denver Christmas Bird Counts. As an adult, she followed his exacting instructions for managing his backyard bird feeders whenever he and Liz were away.

On July 16, Willcockson was memorialized at Trinity United Methodist Church in a "celebration of life" attended by about 200 friends, family and admirers. Recorded birdsong greeted them as they entered, and **Aaron Copland**'s *Fanfare for the Common Man* played as they prepared to leave. Lynn served in numerous roles during 62 years at Trinity, from Sunday school and board trustee to church historian and expert guide of a popular "nooks and crannies" history tour of the 135-year-old downtown landmark.

Speakers recalled from the pulpit how 5 years ago, while leading a writer and photographer from Denver's *303 Magazine* on his backstage tour from basement to steeple, Willcockson gave an unexpected reply when asked if Trinity was "where he finds his peace."

"Oh, I'm an outdoors person," he answered. "I like birds, so being out in nature is where I find my peace" — though he did add that Trinity was a close second.

"Every time I'd see him, our conversation would end up with the birds," family friend **Leon Vasquez** said in a eulogy. Celebrating Willcockson's "very dry sense of humor," he drew gales of laughter by mimicking how Lynn would slip in a bad joke as if divulging a secret, looking both ways and leaning in: "Did you hear about the bird that was afraid to fly?" (Pause). "It was CHICKEN."

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IN SERVICE FROM THE START

Early in his adult birding life, Willcockson was club president (1963-66) in a critical period of DFO's evolution. In 1964, he helped preside over Colorado Bird Club's reset as the field trip-oriented DFO, and over the creation of the new statewide Colorado Field Ornithologists as a separate organization. Lynn eventually served as CFO president as well (1969-71). He was DFO vice president (twice), treasurer and board director, led numerous club trips, and was field trip coordinator for several years. Both bird clubs awarded him their highest honors: DFO's Ptarmigan Award and CFO's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Daughter Barb said that to her father, such honors were "never about him. He was a very humble man" — and at times a very busy one.

In September 1965, a year after the formal DFO-CFO division, Willcockson created a new DFO newsletter, *Monthly Report of Field Observations of the Denver Field Ornithologists*, to replace *Colorado Bird Notes*, the previous periodic bulletin. He was editor and publisher for four years, and in 1971, the newsletter took its present name, *The Lark Bunting*.

"Lynn told us of using a mimeograph in their kitchen to print those first newsletters," longtime DFO member **Mary Cay Burger** recalled. "Lynn was also our (club) insurance expert." Before retirement, he was an insurance agent, the career that brought him to Colorado.

In addition, he volunteered as a bird guide for years at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, led bird walks for Denver Botanic Gardens and Denver Audubon, and conducted Christmas Bird Counts and other field outings at the 3,400-acre Cherokee Ranch & Castle preserve in Douglas County.

VOICE OF RARE BIRD ALERT

But Lynn is best remembered by veteran Colorado birders as creator of the Rare Bird Alert (RBA for short), established in 1979. Recorded daily from the Willcockson family basement in the early years, his call-in service remained in use for decades until communications technology went digital.

"I first 'met' Lynn before I had even joined DFO, when he was the voice of the Rare Bird Alert," said longtime DFO member **Joey Kellner**, who coordinates the Denver Christmas Count in which Lynn also participated faithfully.

Larry Modesitt, a birding friend, knew Lynn's creation was special. Criss-crossing the US on work trips, Modesitt scheduled his travel so he could linger at distant birding hot spots on his off days. "If another state had an RBA, it was invariably weekly," he recalled. "Whenever I expressed disappointment, I heard back, 'What, you have a daily RBA in Colorado?'"

As a matter of fact, yes — thanks to Lynn Willcockson. "Three times I heard back, 'You have the best RBA in the country,'" Modesitt added. "Lynn was diligent at that job at a time when few people in America undertook it."

Audubon Master Birder instructor **Urling Kingery** recalled volunteering together at the Arsenal. "Lynn was really their bird man. He set up the feeders and led bird tours. He loved leading field trips." She also relished seeing Lynn and Liz together at annual potlucks after Christmas counts. "That was our big reunion. He was very low key, totally friendly, and always glad to see you."

KINDNESS TO YOUNG AND OLD

Chris Blakeslee, a friend and birding companion who served with Willcockson on the DFO Board, remembered him as "this really smart, knowledgeable, gentle but strong person who could make connections with people, make compromises and get things done. When he led a trip, he was in charge . . . but it was just with a gentle, 'Well, let's head off this way' demeanor. In every situation I can think of, that was Lynn."

On DFO's Facebook page, field trip leader **Megan Miller** recalled her first Christmas Bird Count as a grade-school kid: "It was frigid along the South Platte River but my mom and I got up bright and early and walked (the) portion led by Lynn and **Tom Bush**. It's one of my earliest memories of birding and . . . of the kindness shown to me as a young birder" by Willcockson.

Others came to know him at DFO's in-person evening programs, greeting arrivals at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. "We were good pals for a long time. Liz would come with Lynn to the meetings," said longtime Colorado birder **Patty Echelmeyer**, 94, who served as DFO president after Lynn in the late 1960s. "He was good for the community."

Continued on page 20

Said Liz: "I was glad to be introduced to the whole birding world. There were some awfully nice people." While Lynn loved birds, Liz loves the Colorado wildflowers they found together on excursions outdoors.

Through the years, Willcockson not only watched birds but photographed them. "His love of photography meshed with his love of birds," his daughter said. "He either had his binoculars around his neck, or his camera, or both." Now the family is going through "boxes and boxes of slides."

FROM ROOTS TO ROCKIES

Born in Des Moines on Aug. 29, 1935, Lynn was the only child of **Herbert** and **Marcella Willcockson**. Although a city boy, he grew up with a strong attachment to the outdoors. "He was a birder from maybe about fifth or sixth grade," said Liz. "He had a teacher who somehow got three of the boys in the class interested in birds. Lynn kind of kept up with the other two over the years."

At about 17, he joined the Iowa Ornithological Union, his home state's bird organization. He also went to college in his hometown, graduating from Drake University with a degree in business. He followed his father into insurance, and Lynn's transfer to a new office for State Auto Insurance brought him to Denver in 1960. Staying with "shirttail relatives" who were members of Trinity church, he joined its young adults group.

About the same time, **Elizabeth "Liz" Walter** arrived in town from her native Mississippi with several other young women. All were schoolteachers, fresh from college and recruited by Jefferson County schools. They stayed initially at the YMCA downtown, just two blocks from Trinity, where she and Lynn soon met. They were married in 1962. Lynn died three weeks short of July 8, the 60th anniversary of their wedding.

In 1966, they bought their first and only home in a new southeast Denver neighborhood. Today it is "a beautifully landscaped bird oasis," daughter Barb said. "Every day he would feed the birds, and if they were going out of town, I had to come over and be shown just how to feed them — suet feeder, black sunflower seed, peanuts."

"DUCK DADDY" TO THE END

Lynn and Liz raised Barb and Brett there into lives of service of a different sort. Both son and daughter chose careers in law enforcement. Today, Barb Archer is deputy chief of the Denver Police Department. Her brother is in DPD's traffic division. "We were sergeants and lieutenants together," she said.

Several years ago, a female Mallard nested and had ducklings in the Willcocksons' backyard. When the brood was ready to move on, "Dad opened the gate and led the momma duck and her ducklings out and down the sidewalk, three blocks east to a gulch," said Barb, who later had a sweatshirt made for him with "Duck Daddy" embroidered on the front. At Lynn's memorial, the sweatshirt was displayed beside his birding hat, surrounded by family photos and his bird photography.

Lynn's sweatshirt and birding hat at memorial
Patrick O'Driscoll

Late in his life, Lynn still pursued his birding passion. "Even with his dementia setting in, he would sit here at the kitchen table with a great view of the feeders and write down the species," Archer said. Her mother added: "He would see everything . . . We kept a list every day."

Besides his wife, daughter and son, Lynn Willcockson is survived by Brett's wife, **Marisa**, and their son and daughter, **Jake** and **Skyler**.

In lieu of flowers, the family has asked that donations be made to DFO (https://dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx) and/or the Trinity United Methodist Church Second Century Foundation (https://trinityumc.org/serve/second-century-foundation/support-the-foundation/

Remembering Lynn Willcockson

Chuck Hundertmark

Shortly after I was first elected president of Denver Field Ornithologists in 2011, **Lynn Willcockson** called, inviting me to lunch with him and fellow DFO board member **Chris Blakeslee**. Lynn and Chris wanted to fill me in on some of the history and philosophy of the club. I had no idea at the time to what extent Lynn's leadership and love of DFO had already shaped it.

Almost 50 years earlier, Lynn had himself served as president (1963-66) in the turbulent and fruitful years when the club, then known as Colorado Bird Club, was spinning off a new statewide organization, now Colorado Field Ornithologists. Lynn became the first president of the renamed Denver Field Ornithologists.

Not yet age 30, Lynn had been in Colorado barely three years when he rose to leadership. Arriving in 1960 from his native Iowa, Lynn had fresh memories of his own membership in the statewide Iowa Ornithological Union. He quickly joined **Thompson Marsh** and other Colorado birding lights in conversations that led to the formation of CFO, an organization he would serve as president after doing the same with DFO. For his decades of service since then, both clubs honored him with their highest accolades: DFO's Ptarmigan Award in 1997 and CFO's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012.

During my years as DFO president, Lynn and his wife, **Liz**, attended the club's monthly meetings regularly. He was unfailingly eager to be helpful at membership and board meetings. While DFO was always close to his heart, he was even more passionate when he was leading trips to Cherokee Ranch & Castle in Douglas County, sharing his knowledge and love of birds. Lynn's spirit lives on in DFO and the Colorado birding community.

Chuck Hundertmark twice served as president of DFO and received the club's Ptarmigan Award in 2015. He leads field trips and is both vice president and Conservation chair of Colorado Field Ornithologists.

Welcome to new DFO members

Carl Bendorf of Longmont; Craig Dahl, Denver; Susanna Donato, Denver; John Ehrmann and Karen Rutledge, Denver; Josh Gilens, Denver; Winston Liu, Lafayette; Victoria Miles, Denver; Debby Miller, Aurora; Guenevere Nelson and Abraham Sandy, Sterling; Cathy and Bob Rolland, Denver; Serge Roumi, Boulder; Susan Shetterly, Denver, and Theodore Washington, Louisville

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Winston Liu, and *In memory of Lynn Willcockson*: Chris Blakeslee

Friends of DFO
Greg Mihalik, and *In memory of Lynn Willcockson*: Gary Buss and Carolyn Buss, and Kathy Dunnewald

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch
Kathy Holland, and Cathy and Bob Rolland

Immature Red-tailed Hawk on Plains fence post
Jim Esten

CONSERVATION CORNER

Xcel's new Power Pathway project: How will birds on Colorado's Plains fare?

Steve Ryder

Colorado has been in the forefront of renewable energy for nearly two decades. In 2004, the state created first-of-their-kind "portfolio standards," goals for increasing energy generation from wind turbines and solar panels. Ten years later, more than 30 states had adopted similar standards that reflected their individual goals for "green" electricity and timelines for developing it.

Today our state is home to more than 2,200 wind turbines on 38 wind farms in 11 of its 64 counties. Those turbines produce almost one-quarter of Colorado's electricity, and now, the state's largest utility, Xcel Energy, wants to take renewables a lot higher. It aims to add 5,500 megawatts of new wind, solar and other renewable energy in Colorado by the year 2030. Beyond that, the company has committed to carbon-free electricity generation across its eight-state service region by 2050.

To handle, transport, and deliver that juice to largely urban customers along the Front Range, Xcel is close to turning dirt on what it calls "Colorado's Power Pathway." This 600-mile transmission network, which will cost $1.7 billion to $2 billion to build, got a green light from the state Public Utilities Commission in early June. To follow through, Xcel must first secure permits and other local approvals from the rural counties where the pathway and its network of new and improved substations will be built over the next five years.

Those places comprise much of the state's sprawling Eastern Plains — and as most Colorado birders know, that territory is also home habitat and a vital migratory highway for prairie-reliant birds. Besides year-round Colorado natives, hundreds of migratory species, from songbirds and waterfowl to raptors and shorebirds, come and go across Colorado's portion of the Central Flyway in spring and fall. More than half of America's waterfowl travel the flyway, a broad, 10-state, Great Plains superhighway for birds. Some migrant birds fly through Colorado at night, others at varying altitudes, and still others rest and refuel at key stopovers on the ground.

With initial construction on Xcel's years-long project expected to begin in 2023, an obvious question looms: How, and how significantly, will the construction and operation of Colorado's Power Pathway affect those birds?

EFFECT ON BIRDS COMPLICATED

This early in the process, definitive answers are hard to nail down. But with thousands of new megawatts in renewable energy to deliver to the Front Range in the next eight years, the construction of Xcel's transmission corridor and the green energy arrays that feed into it undoubtedly will affect wildlife that nest, hunt, forage and travel near, around, through and above it. More immediately, the Power Pathway's corridors, especially in southeastern Colorado, cross broad swaths of areas that migrating birds fly through in spring and fall.

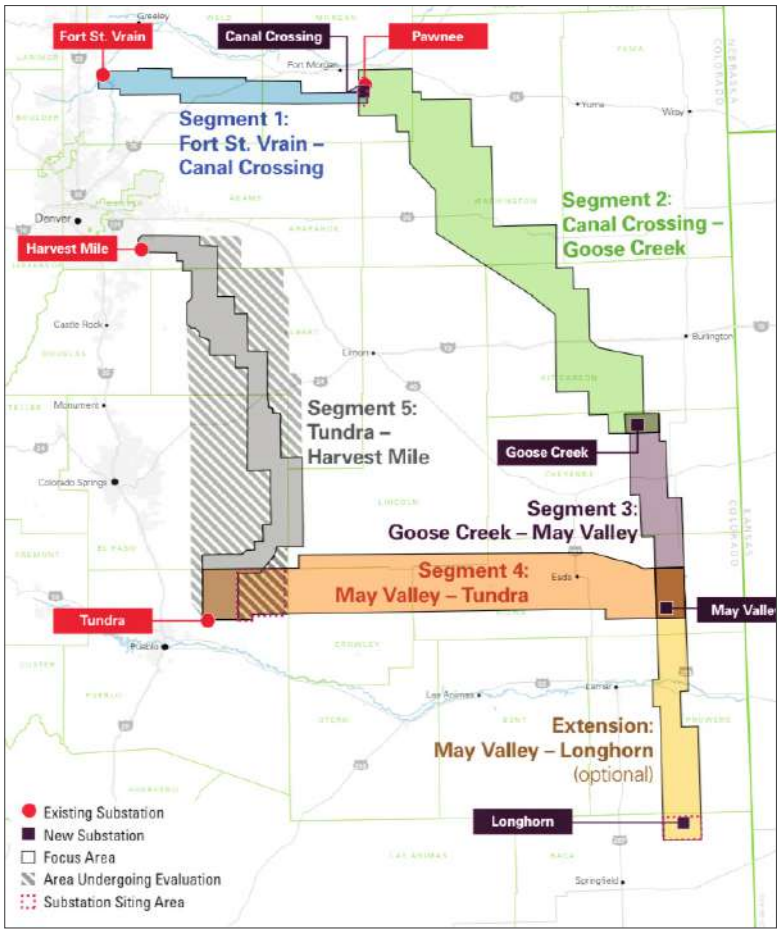
For its part, Xcel declares in some of its project factsheets and FAQs that it "will comply with any recommendations from Colorado Parks & Wildlife and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regarding Colorado's Power Pathway, and will follow recommended non-disturbance buffers and construction timing restrictions to avoid or minimize impacts on special

Continued on page 23

status species." As part of securing local permits from county jurisdictions, the company also says it "will assess the existing conditions and evaluate the anticipated impacts."

Presumably, this would mean that construction work would take seasonal migration, nesting patterns and locations into account to avoid disrupting bird breeding and other activities. At the same time, the wording is non-specific about species and habitat.

In fact, the only direct mention of birds in Xcel's online library of materials about this project is an off-the-shelf "Birds and Powerlines" info sheet that lists standard company procedures for minimizing harm to birds around all of its structures. Strategies range from "nest management" (alternative nest boxes and platforms mounted on "safe" structures near or part of transmission towers) to location and insulation "corrections" on smaller power lines to reduce bird electrocutions and collisions. There is no mention of specific construction-related measures.



Project map of Colorado's Power Pathway
Xcel Energy

There is, however, an unusual wrinkle for this project compared with similar undertakings most places in the West. The familiar abbreviation EIS — short for Environmental Impact Statement — is nowhere to be seen. That's because there is no federal component to the construction or funding of the Power Pathway. None of it crosses through federal government lands. No federal funds are involved in its planning and construction. Thus, there is no formal federal environmental review.

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Colorado Parks & Wildlife are still in the picture where rare and endangered species are concerned. *(See related list of species on page 24)* And as previously noted, Xcel says it intends to comply "with any recommendations" from those agencies.

Even without construction of this project and new wind and solar arrays, the birds of the Eastern Plains continue to face myriad challenges from existing human structures and activity, including collisions with buildings, communication towers and, yes, wind turbines. Utilities and conservationists have been working for years to minimize these usually fatal run-ins, and with some success. There is even a national Avian Power Line Interaction Committee, a cooperative roundtable devoted to this purpose. (Its fall meeting this year is in Colorado, by the way — Oct. 4–5 in Denver.)

Although providing perches for raptors to hunt and nest is not an intentional purpose for this project, years of evidence and experience around existing power-transmission towers in Colorado suggest the end product of construction disruption can offer collateral benefits for some bird species in the largely treeless expanse of eastern Colorado.

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BIRD SPECIES OF CONCERN ON COLORADO PLAINS

Of the 19 bird species of concern in Colorado (Parks & Wildlife's lists of threatened, endangered or "special concern"), the following 13 have actual or potential connection to the grasslands and other habitats of Colorado's Eastern Plains, where the Power Pathway Project and new green-energy generation will be their neighbors.

For detailed accounts of each species' conservation status, consider checking their profiles on the Cornell Lab's All About Birds website, at https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/.

Peregrine Falcon	SE (state "endangered")
Bald Eagle	SC (state "special concern")
Burrowing Owl	ST (state "threatened")
Ferruginous Hawk	SC
Greater Sandhill Crane	SC
Least Tern	SE
Lesser Prairie-Chicken	ST
Long-billed Curlew	SC
Mountain Plover	SC
Plains Sharp-tailed Grouse	SE
Piping Plover	ST, FT (federal "threatened")
Western Snowy Plover	SC
Whooping Crane	SE, FE (federal "endangered")

It is no exaggeration that Xcel's Power Pathway is foundational infrastructure for the future of renewables from the Front Range to the Kansas border. In a presentation to the Colorado Public Utilities Commission, Xcel said the project's need hinges on a "Field of Dreams" theory of erecting new transmission lines now: "If you build it, they will come." In this case, "they" are builders of future solar and wind arrays that would feed renewably generated electricity into Xcel's new pathway.

ON FAR-REACHING PATH . . . TRADEOFFS?

On project maps, the new transmission network will reach east from the company's Fort St. Vrain substation (southwest of Greeley) to a new Canal Crossing substation (southeast of Fort Morgan), then drop southeast to new substations at Goose Creek in Cheyenne County (northwest of Cheyenne Wells) and May Valley in southeastern Kiowa County. From there, the pathway will beeline back west to the Tundra substation outside Pueblo and north again to the Harvest Mile substation southeast of Denver. An optional extension could reach south from Kiowa County to a proposed Longhorn substation in Baca County (northeast of Springfield).

As now envisioned, on-the-ground work on five interconnected sections of the power line — each taking about 2 years to finish — would begin in 2023 with Segment 2 (Fort Morgan to Cheyenne County) and Segment 3 (Cheyenne south through east Kiowa County). Work on Segment 1 (Fort St. Vrain to Fort Morgan) would begin in 2024, and construction of Segment 4 (Kiowa west to Pueblo) and Segment 5 (northeast of Pueblo to east of Denver) would begin in 2025.

To gain public support and educate communities on its plans, Xcel continues to hold open houses and community meetings on the Plains. A community meeting in Eads on Aug. 9 will address Xcel's "1041 permit" application for Kiowa County approval to build 86 miles of the Power Pathway and a new substation in that county. More such meetings are expected to follow into 2023 and beyond. Counties in Colorado have approval and permitting authority over a broad list of 21 kinds of major projects, including "public utility facilities" like this one.

As with any endeavor that affects the natural environment, perhaps tradeoffs may emerge. Between now and 2030, Xcel aims to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in Colorado by 85 percent, removing coal-fired generation and adding more emission-free electricity. Could that progress, beneficial for humans and wildlife alike, balance potential damage or disruption, temporary or permanent, of avian habitat and birds by this project, on the way to carbon-zero power generation? Should it even be open to discussion?

Continued on page 25

Renewable energy advocates and wildlife conservationists, particularly birders, are often torn between two desirables: The promise of clean energy and a passion for birds and their protection. I would venture to guess that along the Front Range, most Coloradans support clean energy *and* bird conservation. Solutions are often difficult to achieve or find, and what may stand in the way is the need for a better understanding of the needs of the birds. The "3 Billion Birds Gone" study in the journal *Science* in 2019 reported that one in four birds in North America has disappeared just since I've been in junior high school. This includes 720 million grassland birds, a decrease of 53 percent, and 2.5 billion migratory birds, a decline of 28 percent. What's causing the decline of birds in the grasslands of the Great Plains, including in eastern Colorado, is often not easy to determine, and it's never just one reason.

WHAT'S NEXT — FOR YOU

If you're wondering what you can do, here are three suggestions and a list of places to read more deeply:

1. **Read the source materials for this article** *(below)* to become more familiar with the Colorado's Power Pathway project
2. **Become more familiar with the *3 Billion Birds Gone* study** mentioned above. Here's a link to the report and great explanatory materials: https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back/
3. **Send Xcel Energy your comments and ideas** about the Power Pathway project. There's a general inquiry phone line for the project at 855-858-9037 and an address for email: ColoradosPowerPathway@xcelenergy.com

Links to sources:

Xcel Power Pathway project
https://www.coloradospowerpathway.com/

Birds/powerlines info sheet
https://www.coloradospowerpathway.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Birds-and-Powerlines-Fact-Sheet.pdf

Colorado Sun — It's our new cash crop
https://coloradosun.com/2022/06/19/eastern-plains-renewable-energy-xcel-power-pathway/

CPW — Energy development + land use
https://cpw.state.co.us/conservation/Pages/CON-Energy-Land.aspx

Colorado land use planning
https://freecounties.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/DOLA-saying-control-is-at-local-levels-in-CO.pdf

Avian Power Line Interaction Committee
https://www.aplic.org/

3 Billion Birds Gone — how to help
https://www.3billionbirds.org/

Red-tailed Hawk
Jim Esten

Steve Ryder, a Denver native and DFO's Conservation chair, grew up watching Sandhill Cranes along the Platte River in Nebraska. His career work has included mountaineering and fly-fishing instructor, land trust executive, college professor, and state invasive plant watchdog.

FIELD TRIPS

Field Tripping: A nesting season ramble in NE Colorado

The trip: Northeast Colorado hotspots (Logan Morgan, Sedgwick counties)
Date: June 10, 2022
Leader: Diane Roberts + 7 participants
Species: 78 across 12 eBird checklists

Upland Sandpiper
Gary Witt

Continued on page 27

Diane Roberts

DFO goes to Northeast Colorado! Our group of nine ventured to Tamarack Ranch State Wildlife Area in Logan County, our first stop along the South Platte River corridor after a 3-hour drive out Interstate 76 from our meet-up point near Barr Lake.

We came in search of Northern Cardinal, Bell's Vireo, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. In a combined three hours of birding at both ends of Tamarack, we saw those and so many more (about 30 species on each side), from a Ladder-backed and a dozen Red-headed woodpeckers to a yellow-shafted Northern Flicker, Field Sparrows, and multiple Baltimore and Orchard orioles.

Onward we went to Crook (only 10 minutes away) in search of Upland Sandpiper, previously seen near that tiny town (population: 133). Although we saw 15 species in half an hour there, none was an Upland. But just four minutes after leaving there, we found four of that adorable shorebird and 10 other species in just a 12-minute stop along Logan County Road 67 to the southwest. (The Upland was a new lifer for four of us!) The prairie dog colony at that spot had Burrowing Owl, and we also saw pairs of Grasshopper Sparrow and Dickcissel.

Diane Roberts, a DFO member since 2016, has led field trips since 2018 and is a member of the Field Trip Committee. Retired from the finance sector, she lives in Highlands Ranch.

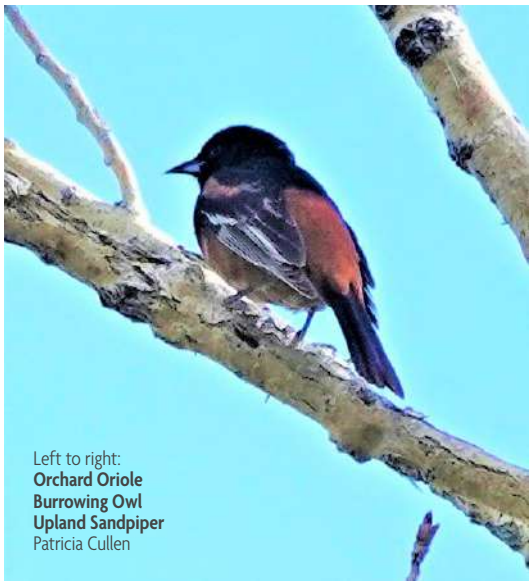
From there, we reversed course and drove northeast again, past Crook and Tamarack, to Red Lion SWA, where we encountered Avocet, Stilt Sandpiper and six other kinds of waders and shorebirds (including 11 White-face Ibises), plus 50 American White Pelicans and both Cinnamon and Blue-winged teal. Up the road beyond the parking lot were two more Bell's Vireos.

Turning back upstream and southwest, we spent the next three hours or so hopscotching to brief stops and handfuls of species sightings at half a dozen familiar spots, from Jumbo Reservoir (another Burrowing Owl, and a Red-tailed Hawk that stirred debate: Krider's or Eastern?) to a roadside stop along US 138 southwest of Crook (two more Upland Sandpipers) and Monahan Park in the middle of the town of Sterling (Mississippi Kite).

About an hour and a half later, near 4 p.m., our last stop was Brush SWA, with 26 species, one of them the day's only Double-crested Cormorant.

It was a lovely day on the prairie, with no wind and comfortable temperatures, and all of the target birds. What could be better?

Continued on page 28



Left to right:
Orchard Oriole
Burrowing Owl
Upland Sandpiper
Patricia Cullen

FIELD TRIPPING *cont from page 27*

Yellow-billed Cuckoo in flight
Gary Witt

Yellow-shafted Northern Flicker
Gary Witt

Baltimore Oriole in flight
Gary Witt

Grasshopper Sparrow singing
Gary Witt

Field Tripping + : Annual check-in from DFO's special high-country birding patch

The trip: Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area (Summit County)
Date: June 21, 2022
Leaders: Paul Slingsby & Chris Blakeslee + 4 participants
Species: 24 across four eBird checklists

American Robin with mouthful
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 30

FIELD TRIPPING *cont from page 29*

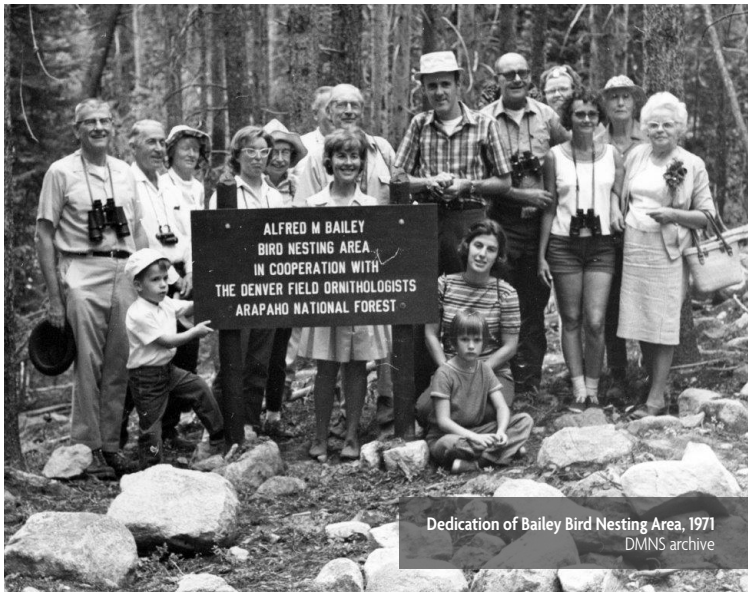
Patrick O'Driscoll
Show of hands: Who knows that there is a prime avian breeding ground in the Colorado high country with the "Denver Field Ornithologists" name on it?

Thanks to the urging of our club forebears half a century ago, the Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area was established in Arapaho National Forest (now White River NF) in Summit County. The trailhead sign in Eagles Nest Wilderness that marks this special preserve declares that DFO "founded" it in 1971. Technically, it was established by the U.S. Forest Service *with* DFO and others, but the club was instrumental in pushing for its establishment.

The Forest Service says the Bailey area was "designated as a high diversity bird area by the Denver Field Ornithologists," featuring "a variety of habitats used by diverse species." Its name honors **Alfred M. Bailey**, renowned ornithologist, longtime director of the Denver Museum of Natural History (now Nature & Science) and co-author with **Robert J. Niedrach** of *Birds of Colorado*, the seminal, two-volume historical reference.

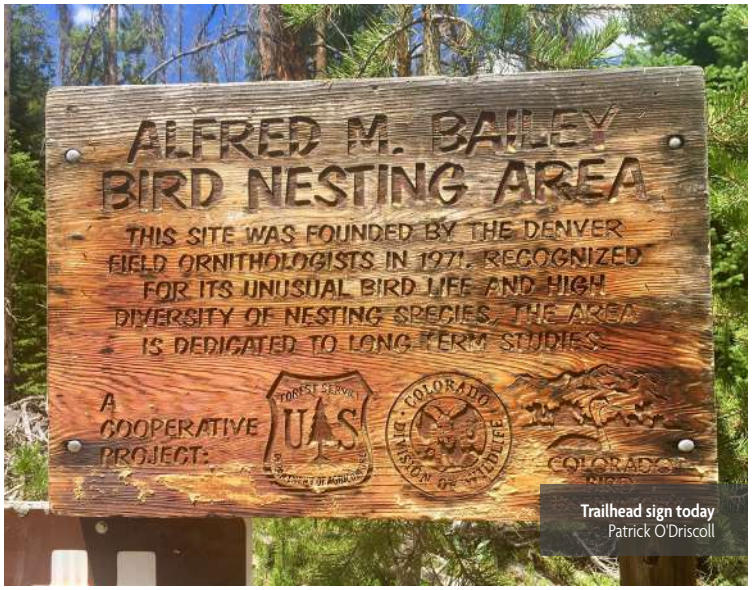
The nesting area is a little remote (about 10 miles northwest and upslope from the I-70 exit at Silverthorne) and is only hikeable between June and October (except for X-C skis and snowshoes the rest of the time). To no surprise, only about 200 eBird checklists have been recorded there, even with the recent discovery of a super-rare Cassia Crossbill in mid-July by Boulder County birder **Eric DiFonso**. The site's species list is modest, too — 102 found by eBirders.

What it lacks in birder foot traffic and marquee popularity, the Bailey nesting area makes up for in sheer scenic and natural splendor. Veteran field trip leaders **Paul Slingsby** and **Chris Blakeslee** remind us of that each year when they lead a DFO summer excursion there. Their band of six DFO participants on this year's June 21 outing trekked into the area's lush heart: wildflower-strewn North Rock Creek Meadows, which spill downslope from snow-patched Keller Mountain, an east-facing Gore Range 13'er.



Dedication of Bailey Bird Nesting Area, 1971
DMNS archive

DFO group at newer Bailey area sign
Patrick O'Driscoll



Trailhead sign today
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 31

FIELD TRIPPING *cont from page 30*

Coming and going, including stops along the 3-mile access road from State Highway 9, we glimpsed Hairy Woodpeckers, Olive-sided Flycatchers, Steller's Jays, a Red-naped Sapsucker and Pine Grosbeaks, amidst an intermittent chorus of Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Warbling Vireos. We had to work for our modest total of 24 species, though that's slightly above the average of past DFO visits.

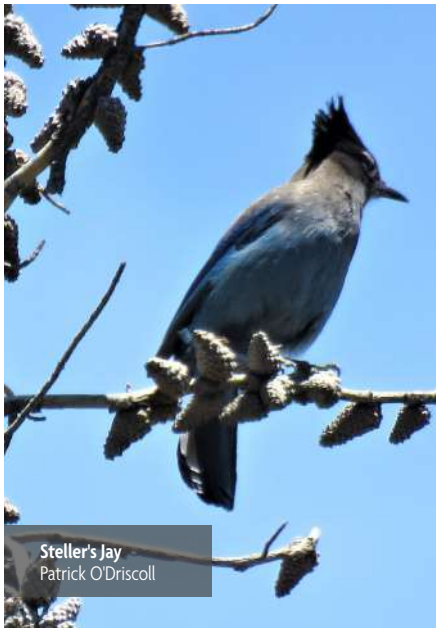
Although the route has only short bursts of elevation change, two natural features made the hike challenging at times: Numerous dead and fallen Lodgepole pines, and the meadows' extensive underburrowing by Northern Pocket Gophers. The *eskers* (tunnel-like mounds) of the unseen rodents made the footing rather like hiking across a field of loose and uneven cobblestones.

But Blakeslee's impressive flora ID skills made the day a valuable field lesson in trees (a complex mix of Lodgepole Pine, Subalpine Fir, Englemann Spruce and Aspen) and innumerable wildflowers, from the lowly but huge and bright common dandelion (a Colorado invader since 1859) to two species of wild orchids. So much diversity underfoot, even if many of the feathered residents were hiding.

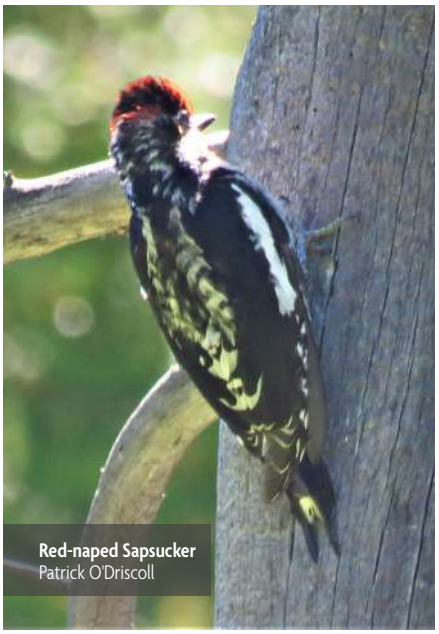
On the return leg, about 15 minutes from the trailhead, we passed an unremarkable trailside puddle — until Chris called us back to behold several tiny White Bog Orchids sprouting along its edge.

Blakeslee's compilation of DFO field trip species sightings for the past 8 years begins on the next page.

Thumbnail-sized Calypso orchids on forest floor
Patrick O'Driscoll



Steller's Jay
Patrick O'Driscoll



Red-naped Sapsucker
Patrick O'Driscoll

Hairy Woodpecker
Patrick O'Driscoll

North Rock Creek meadow, Mount Keller
Patrick O'Driscoll

Cumulative list (June/July 2015-2022) of bird species observed on DFO field trips: Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area, Eagles Nest Wilderness Area, White River NF, Summit County, CO

Chris Blakeslee

DESCRIPTION

The Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area was established in 1971 by the US Forest Service, DFO, then-Colorado Division of Wildlife (now Parks & Wildlife) and then-Colorado Bird Observatory (now Rocky Mountain Bird Conservancy). A USFS special management area for high-elevation avian research, it also is designated an Audubon Important Bird Area (IBA).

Its more than 5,000 acres in North Rock Creek drainage on the eastern slope of the Gore Range rise from 8,700 feet near the Blue River to 13,085 feet on Keller Mountain. The Forest Service's bird checklist here totals 89 species, though eBird now lists 102. Research has documented 44 species that breed in the nesting area, 29 of them migratory.

HABITATS

Spruce-fir forest, Lodgepole pine forest, Aspen grove, willow *carr* (wet woodland), grassy meadow, riparian, and alpine tundra.

For eight nesting seasons from 2015 to 2022, DFO field trips in June or July have recorded 50 bird species in the nesting area and confirmed 11 of them as nesting. Species counted on these trips include a high of 30 and a per-trip average of 21.7.

SPECIES STATISTICS

Birds

NOTE: Number beside each species indicates how many DFO field trips (2015-22) recorded the bird. It also indicates scale of species status, from seldom seen (1) to always seen (11); the 10s and 11s are in boldface as the most common. Confirmed nesters are indicated with italic notes and breeding status.

Continued on page 33

1 Mallard
1 Mourning Dove
10 Broad-tailed Hummingbird
1 Wilson's Snipe
1 Turkey Vulture
1 Osprey (new in 2022)
1 Sharp-shinned Hawk
1 Northern Goshawk
5 Red-tailed Hawk
10 Red-naped Sapsucker *– nesting (occupied nest, carrying food)*
1 American Three-toed Woodpecker
5 *Hairy Woodpecker – nesting (carrying food)*
11 Northern Flicker
6 Olive-sided Flycatcher
10 Western Wood-Pewee *– nesting (nest building)*
1 Hammond's Flycatcher
3 Dusky Flycatcher
3 Cordilleran Flycatcher – nesting (occupied nest with eggs)
10 Warbling Vireo *– nesting (occupied nest)*
4 Canada Jay
7 Steller's Jay
1 Black-billed Magpie
2 American Crow
7 Common Raven
1 Black-capped Chickadee
11 Mountain Chickadee *– nesting (occupied nest, carrying food)*
2 Tree Swallow – nesting (occupied nest)
8 Violet-green Swallow – nesting (occupied nest)
10 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
9 Red-breasted Nuthatch
4 White-breasted Nuthatch – nesting (occupied nest, feeding young)
1 Brown Creeper
8 House Wren
2 Mountain Bluebird
2 Hermit Thrush
11 American Robin *– nesting (occupied nest, carrying food)*
3 Pine Grosbeak (new in 2021)
7 Pine Siskin
1 Chipping Sparrow
1 Fox Sparrow (new in 2022) Only six times between 1876 to 1956 was Fox Sparrow found to breed in the state. In June 1964, DFO member **George Shier** of Golden found a nesting Fox Sparrow here; subsequently, Bailey himself photographed the nest (see Birds of Colorado – Bailey & Niedrach)
10 Dark-eyed Junco (Gray-headed)
9 White-crowned Sparrow (*oriantha*)
11 Lincoln's Sparrow *– nesting (occupied nest, carrying food)*
1 Green-tailed Towhee (New in 2022)
1 Red-winged Blackbird
1 MacGillivray's Warbler
5 Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's)
10 Wilson's Warbler
2 Western Tanager
3 Black-headed Grosbeak

In addition, DFO trips have observed and recorded mammals, butterflies and native orchids in the nesting area.

Mammals and signs:

- Shrew species
- Beaver – active dams and lodge
- Chickaree or Red Squirrel – nests
- Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, Chipmunk species
- Northern Pocket Gopher eskers (tunnel mounds)
- Long-tailed Weasel
- Coyote and Black Bear – scat
- Bull Moose male in velvet antlers
- Mule Deer male in velvet antlers and doe with fawn

Butterflies (list incomplete, in development):

- Mourning Cloak – *Nymphalis antiopa*
- Anise Swallowtail – *Papilio zelicaon*
- Assorted species of Blue, Sulphur, Fritillary and Checkerspot varieties

Native orchids (number of times seen):

- Calypso Orchid – *Calypso bulbosa* (5)
- White Bog Orchid – *Platanthera sp.* (3)

Chris Blakeslee, a DFO member for more than 40 years, focuses his field trips on both fauna and flora. A retired elementary school teacher and former DFO Board member, he lives in Centennial.

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	$	_____
Hawk Watch donation (DFO community science)	$	_____
Total	$	_____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____
(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:
Kathy Holland, 351 E Caley Ave, Centennial, CO 80121-2201

THE LARK BUNTING
6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660

THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 58 | ISSUE 10 | OCTOBER 2022 DFOBIRDS.ORG

PROGRAMS

Fun focus on raptor ID: Hello, Hawktober!

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BILL TURNER "IN THE SCOPE"

From zoo reptile guy to DFO programs impresario

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HISTORY ESSAY

In century-old steps of pioneer Denver birder

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FROM THE FIELD

Field trips by numbers: A busy, booming year

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH »

Rufous Hummingbird

Rob Raker

Ira & Tammy's house
Golden, CO

ON THE COVER

Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography and still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

Rufous Hummingbird: Coppery sprite is hard to miss — hard to spot, too

When it's mid-to-late summer in Colorado, it's not just hummingbird time — it's Rufous Hummingbird time. Or it can be. Potentially. Sometimes. Or . . . maybe not?

Such is the at times-maddening unpredictability of seeing this feisty, coppery visitor on the Colorado leg of its epic migration (up to 3,900 miles each way), looping roughly clockwise from Mexico to the Pacific Northwest/Alaska and back. In late winter and spring, the route north parallels the Pacific Coast. In late summer and autumn, the route south follows the Rockies, including the Front Range. If you're lucky you might see one at your feeders just out of the foothills.

That's where this month's cover bird showed up somewhat early this year. Lakewood photographer and DFO member **Rob Raker** found him on the morning of July 23 in the Golden yard of veteran DFO'ers **Ira** and **Tammy Sanders**. "Tammy is the amazing gardener of the family," said Rob, "responsible for creating a smorgasbord of plants and flowers for the hummers to feed from. They also have a couple of feeders that this male Rufous was tirelessly guarding." Whenever a Broad-tailed Hummingbird came by, he chased it away. (If you look closely, you'll see he'd been at the plants; his gorget is spattered with pollen.)

That's Rufous: Small, fiercely territorial, and just plain feisty — so relentless on the attack that it is said to be *the* most aggressive hummingbird. It's one of four hummingbird species found in our state, typically if not commonly. The others are Calliope (another strict migrant) and two Colorado nesters, Broad-tailed (from the Front Range west) and Black-chinned (far Western Slope, southern Front Range and south to southwest).

In Colorado, Rufous is most reliably found in mountain meadows up to 12,000 feet, refueling for 1- to 2-week periods among summer wildflowers as it makes its way south. (In any season, all hummingbirds feed constantly, and Rufouses may visit more than 1,000 flowers a day for nectar, according to the American Bird Conservancy.) On occasion, some Rufous Hummingbirds winter on the Gulf Coast as far east as the Florida Panhandle, but most go to southern and central Mexico as well as the Baja Peninsula in Mexico's northwest.

Fun fact: Rufouses that reach southeastern Alaska not only nest farther north than any other hummingbird, they also have the longest known aviation migration on Earth when measured by body length, according to Cornell's *Birds of the World*. The species also apparently has a steel-trap memory for the location of food sources. Observers have reported seeing some returning migrants checking where a feeder had been hung previously but had since been moved.

Interestingly, the leading conservation authority, International Union for Conservation of Nature, rates the Rufous a "species of least concern," even though breeding bird surveys in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia have suggested 2 percent annual population declines from the mid-1960s through 2010. For what it's worth, Rufous population estimates range wildly from 6.5 million to 22 million.

There is no dispute, however, that habitat loss is a threat, as are outdoor cats, other predators, and collisions with untreated windows.

— Patrick O'Driscoll

Patrick O'Driscoll, a DFO member since 2014, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads field trips (his patch is Denver City Park) and has been editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020.

DFO? It's me.

. . . ON BELONGING

As an avian biologist, I am often away from home — and DFO — for months at a time. When I return, DFO welcomes me back like family. I count on our club to guide me to new places, to meet other passionate Colorado birders. I love belonging to a community where we share the joy of birding in a place of incomparable landscapes and uncommon avian diversity. Membership in DFO brings us — and the birds — together.

MEGAN MILLER
Member since 2018

DFO: It's ALL of us

To renew or start your Denver Field Ornithologists membership (good through 2023 if paid after Oct. 1) , AND to make tax-free, year-end contributions, visit dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership

dfo
DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

FROM THE PRESIDENT

They're cute, cuddly . . . and predatory

Susan Blansett

Chances are the title of my column this month is a tipoff. Yep: It's about cats.

In July, my central Golden neighborhood was astonished when a mountain lion was discovered on our block, right there on 19th Street. It had already killed two adult racoons and at least one of their four young. The other three were up a tree, one sitting atop Mom, who had herded the remaining kits up there before dying herself.

The big cat, estimated at 80 pounds, was sunning itself calmly next door, having had its meal. We never learned if the responding wildlife officers tranquilized and moved it, or euthanized it, or where the young raccoons went. Anyway, all involved were gone the next morning.

We've all heard stories of wild predators becoming habituated to humans, and it's always a sensation when we see it close to home. It's a little strange, then, that we humans have become habituated to a different lethal feline: the domestic housecat (*felis catus*), which is estimated to catch and kill about 2 billion birds each year in the US alone. Our indifference is not necessarily universal, however.

In mid-August, a news story on National Public Radio recounted how the Polish Academy of Sciences "has declared that cats are dangerous, adding them to its list of 'invasive alien species.'" The news report went on to say that the institution isn't alone: "In some Icelandic towns, household cats have a curfew." Although the Polish academy was merely suggesting that cat owners limit their pets' time outdoors during birds' breeding season, cat owners responded with fury and indignation.

Unlike mountain lions and other native predators, however, domestic cats (whether feral or well-fed and -housed) kill indiscriminately and seldom consume their prey. Although housecats can be kept quite happily indoors (or even given access to ingenious outdoor enclosures), many owners feel the need to let theirs roam daily, at least for a while. Perhaps they think their beloved pets do no harm because they don't witness kills. But cats *are* predators that will pounce on anything that moves, whether a ball of yarn, a mouse, a baby bird or a parent bird with young in a low-lying nest.

The American Bird Conservancy's website is a superb resource for conscientious cat owners (https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/), including a whole webpage of "Solutions for Pet Cats." Another concerned party, the Georgia Ornithological Society, says on its website: "The pet cat population of the United States has tripled during the past 40 years, and the number of abandoned and feral (unsocialized) cats likewise appears to have increased substantially." The society promotes cat-owner education and even helps pay for removal of feral cats from the outdoors under its TRAP fund, for "Targeted Removal of non-native Avian Predators."

Some communities practice "trap-neuter-release," or TNR for short. But this is a population control method, not removal of feral cats. In fact, it includes feeding them, so it doesn't reduce their number — and it may, in fact, reduce biodiversity in areas where it is practiced.

Denver Field Ornithologists espouses conservation of habitats that nourish and shelter birds, whether year-round inhabitants or migrant species. Worthy instances for acting are abundant, and DFO takes time to deliberate, plan and commit to making a difference. When our Conservation Committee first talked about the cats-and-birds issue two years ago, other pressing topics occupied our attention. But committee chair **Steve Ryder** and I agree that acting soon on this is imperative. (*Read the essay that Steve, a cat lover himself, wrote on in last September's issue of* The Lark Bunting *at https://dfobirds.org/News/Archives/2020-2029/2021/09_Sep_2021_LB.pdf.*) There's no question that, in a community of birders that includes cat lovers, DFO will side with the birds.

While we consider organizational action by DFO, you can act immediately on your own. American Bird Conservancy suggests two ways to begin:

- Sign the pledge to keep your cats safely contained (https://act.abcbirds.org/a/take-action-cats-pledge/)
- Subscribe to ABC's "Cats Indoors" newsletter at https://act.abcbirds.org/a/email-cats

If you have strong feelings about the "cat issue," let me know and we'll follow up on this topic again soon. Either use the "Contact Us" field at the bottom of the DFO homepage at https://dfobirds.org/, or email me directly at susanblansett@gmail.com.

— Susan

Susan Blansett, club president since 2021, has volunteered in numerous committee roles and as an officer since joining the DFO Board in 2016. She became a field trip leader this year. Susan works for the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share them: club news, Colorado birding newsbits, personal eBird milestones, quick tales from the trail, birding life (and life bird!) events, etc. Send your items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor* ***Patrick O'Driscoll*** *at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

DFO field trippers in 2019
Patrick O'Driscoll

WELCOME, NEW DFO FIELD TRIP LEADERS!

The ranks of our club's volunteer field trip leaders have grown this summer with four freshly trained additions to the team. They include **Anne Craig**, **Gary Witt**, **Nathan Bond** and **Benjamin Jacques**. Anne and Gary have led their first trips, and Ben and Nate's first official trips are scheduled in September. DFO's roster of certified trip leaders now totals 44, and 32 of them have led at least one regular DFO outing so far in 2022. If leading field trips interests you, find out more from **David Suddjian**, chair of the Field Trip Committee. You can reach him at dsuddjian@gmail.com.

THIRD AUTUMN BIRD ID "BOMB" TO DROP IN NOVEMBER

Here's a reminder that the next two DFO "Bird Bombs" mini-workshops via Zoom will be "*Fall for Sparrows: Five autumn visitors*" on **Thursday, Sept. 8 at 7 p.m. MDT** (register at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_rwgrz2TvQX6p6xhE8UeUpA), and "*Looking at Loons: Fall and winter visitors*" on **Thursday, Oct. 13, 7 p.m. MDT** (register at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_7imNtwMZSVqOfpBzR8GR5w).

Now waiting in the wings is a newly added "Bird Bombs" offering: "*Forest Hawks: Identifying our Accipiters*," set for **Thursday, Nov. 17, at 7 p.m. MST** (register at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_dCqJ5q0BSeq6tzt2TZ5xaw).

Bird Bombs are 30-minute online "bursts of bird ID info" on focused topics. For those who cannot attend these sessions live, the Zoom recordings for each will be posted afterwards on the DFO website's past-programs archive at https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx.

SO LONG, SPRING AND FALL BIRD COUNTS

In a bow to the power of eBird's data-gathering capacity, the DFO Board has voted to discontinue the Spring and Fall Bird Counts, first conducted more than 40 years ago in a volunteer effort led by longtime Colorado birding authority **Hugh Kingery**. In the years since DFO took over, the counts' demise was abetted by a combination of dwindling participation by volunteer birders and the diminished value of data gathered when so many birds are on the move in spring and autumn.

This seasonal endeavor grew to cover about 10 prominent hotspots around the greater Denver area, from Barr Lake, Chatfield and Cherry Creek state parks to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge and beyond. For decades, in the fashion of National Audubon's annual Christmas Bird Count, the metro Denver tallies provided a rare and repeated sample of bird numbers for key locations and areas, some of them rarely surveyed so thoroughly except in the Christmas counts. But as they occurred in the heart of spring and fall migration, bird numbers and species variety could vary widely. That plus changes in the counts' coverage and field effort made using the historical data difficult for scientific analysis.

Continued on page 6

Meanwhile, as elsewhere, birding has boomed in popularity this past decade along the Front Range. With eBird's explosive growth as the place to record every bird on every outing every day, the locations covered by these spring and fall counts just once each season are now surveyed by skilled birders almost daily during both migrations. That has rendered continued club-sponsored counts repetitive, isolated and uneven. DFO thanks the members and non-members who participated through the years in an effort that, if less relevant now, was still a vital experience appreciated by all.

LARK BUNTING ESSAYIST HAS NEW BLOG ON TWILIGHT FLIERS

DFO member and newsletter contributor **Jared Del Rosso**, whose essay on early Denver birding around Cheesman Park is on page 16 of this month's issue, has begun a new blog. *The Lonesome Whip-poor-will* is about his favorite bird family: The clan of nocturnal and twilight-flying species known as nightjars (aka "goatsuckers," a superstitious and folkloric name first attributed to the Greek philosopher **Aristotle**). "I find every encounter with (nightjars) thrilling," says Del Rosso, who this summer has noted numerous nighthawks (another branch of the family) flying near his home in Denver's southern suburbs. "Though they're relatively common, they're really difficult to encounter . . . Every one is unexpected." As a cultural sociologist, he is also jazzed by their place in folklore, literature and song. "Even before I became a birder, one of my favorite songs was *Whip-poor-will* by Magnolia Electric Co. I still listen to it on drives home from seeing Nighthawks and hearing Poorwills." Read Jared's blog at *https://lonesomewhippoorwill.com/*.

CASSIA CROSSBILLS ARE GETTING AROUND

Colorado birdsound expert **Nathan Pieplow**, who in late August presented a DFO program on the best bird sounds we've never heard (*read the review on page 22*), has updated the rarest Colorado bird that we're suddenly hearing all over: Cassia Crossbill. Reporting on CoBirds, Pieplow confirmed recordings of the rare finch in Park and Eagle counties, both in the first week of August. This means at least four counties now claim reports of the species, previously thought to be confined only to relatively tiny patches of forest habitat in southern Idaho. The Colorado locations all are within about a 20-mile radius of the Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area in Summit County, where this year's first recordings drew wide attention to the species.

The Bailey nesting site, as we noted in last month's newsletter, is a mountain preserve created more than 50 years ago primarily at the urging of DFO. (The US Forest Service sign at the trailhead credits DFO as having "founded" the site in 1971.) Colorado's first Cassia report was just a year ago in Grand County. The two latest records were by **JoAnn Potter Riggle** at Sylvan Lake SP in Eagle County on Aug. 4 and by Pieplow himself between Michigan Creek Campground and Georgia Pass in Park on Aug. 6. Both recordings were confirmed by the Finch Research Network. Pieplow believes the "invasion" may be more widespread, and he encourages birders "to actively look in more areas. Keep an eye on those lodgepole pine stands!"

Chihuahuan Meadowlark
Jack Parlapiano via eBird

NEW MEADOWLARK SPECIES FOR COLORADO? ¡AY, CHIHUAHUAN!

In early August, the American Ornithological Society announced a split of Eastern Meadowlark into two species; Eastern Meadowlark, and the new Chihuahuan Meadowlark. The decision was based on new vocal analysis and genome sequencing from a Colorado researcher's undergraduate study of the subject at CU-Boulder. That researcher, **Johanna Beam**, now a PhD student at Penn State, made the proposal to split into two species: Chihuahuan Meadowlark (*Sturnella lilianae*) and Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*). Eastern Meadowlark isn't seen or heard often in Colorado, but southern Colorado's proximity to the new species' range

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NEWS NOTES *cont from page 6*

may mean more encounters. At least three of the 26 Eastern Meadowlark occurrences recorded in the past half-century refer to the Lilian's subspecies most identified with Southwest US populations in AZ and NM. Other records of Eastern Meadowlark in southern Colorado will be re-examined to see if they, too, represent the new species.

Interestingly, Beam listed four possible English names for the new meadowlark in her proposal: Chihuahuan, High Desert, Pallid, and White-tailed. She recommended Pallid because it is "the palest of meadowlarks" and because a Mexican subspecies of the new species does not occur in the Chihuahuan Desert of southern AZ and NM, west TX and north-central Mexico. Nevertheless, the authorities went with Chihuahuan. Here's the society's official announcement of the reclassification: https://americanornithology.org/sixty-third-supplement-to-checklist-of-north-american-birds-publishes-in-ornithology/

Got DFO merch? Gear up online

You can order items with the colorful Denver Field Ornithologists logo — T-shirts, caps, water bottles and more — at the "Official DFO Shop" on Zazzle, a print-on-demand service. Items come in tons of colors and sizes up to 2XL. Proceeds will help support DFO projects like Hawk Watch, the Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund, and general club operations.

To visit the shop, click this link: https://www.zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop

Don't see any item you'd like with the new DFO "brand"? Contact DFO Membership chair **Sue Summers** (summerssue@hotmail.com) or VP **Sharon Tinianow** (sharontinianow@gmail.com) with your requests and ideas for different ones.

The Lark Bunting newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists is published monthly except for joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submit original articles to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. Editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any such materials.

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Ted Floyd
Abby Santurbane

Letting Go: Birding and Nature Study in the Age of Zoomers and Alphas

Ted Floyd
September 26
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

Attention Gen X and Baby Boom birders: Your moment of 21st century birding Zen is at hand. Thus will sayeth the generational prophet, birding seer and prolific author **Ted Floyd** in a most provocative evening presentation on Sept. 26.

Floyd, the Lafayette-based, longtime editor of American Birding Association's award-winning *Birding* magazine, will address "the proverbial peaceful transfer of power to the next generation, or generations, of advocates for birds and nature and the whole world." Translation: Get ready to "step aside and get out of the way," birding elders. But he adds, with a twist, that younger generations "can't get there without 'us.' Not quite yet."

Floyd, author of five books ("with several more on the way"), most recently *How to Know the Birds*, will talk about the birding culture of our youngest cohorts, from Z to A. Floyd means Gen Z (Zoomers) and its younger siblings (Alphas). He promises a "spirited and respectful" session about passing the torch without burning anyone.

"The 'standard model' for our age is welcomeness and inclusivity," Floyd says. "But what if the methods and mores of Gen X and Boomer birders are incompatible with those of Alpha and Zoomer birders? What if 'their' aspiration and ideals are ill-served by 'ours'?" One way forward, he suggests, is for birding elders to "let go. Binoculars and field guides, waking up early and joining bird clubs, even field ID and keeping a list — maybe birding doesn't have to be about any of that" in the world Zoomers and Alphas are poised to inherit.

"Definitely not another 'How to Use eBird' or 'Shorebirds Made Simple' presentation!" Floyd wisecracked in an advance note about his talk.

The author of more than 200 popular articles, technical papers and book chapters on birds and nature, Floyd is especially interested in analyzing bird vocalizations, interpreting birds and nature for children and beginners, and applying new media and technologies to the appreciation of nature.

To register for this free Sept. 26 Zoom presentation, click this registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_zm7ma0CIRXW_B6bu-vGNBw

You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Floyd's program as the date approaches.

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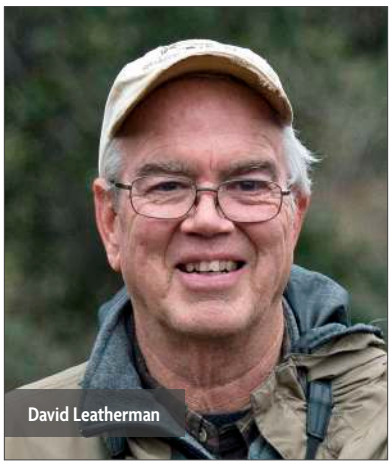

David Leatherman

To register for this free Oct. 24 Zoom presentation, click this registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_kCjMM8bCTxy7h9hNJFvdsg

You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Leatherman's presentation as the date approaches.

Life History of the Best Tree in Our World

David Leatherman
October 24
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

When **David Leatherman** — curious birder, expert bugman, exacting photographer and deft wordsmith — told us the subject of his DFO evening presentation, he described it with this riddle:

"They smell like vanilla, sport dimples in their bark, feed pine beetles, house Pygmy Nuthatches, inspired **Albert Bierstadt**, frame the Front Range, fuel ferocious fires and comfort squirrels with tufted ears."

They are Ponderosa pines, Leatherman continued, "the best tree in our world." Sign up for his free Zoom presentation for what's sure to be an entertaining defense. His talk will "celebrate the natural history of this wonderful tree, featuring the diverse birdlife among its boughs."

A veteran of numerous previous DFO presentations, Leatherman served more than three decades as the forest entomologist for the Colorado State Forest Service (1974-2005). Out of his deep background in insects that draw birds into Colorado's forests, Leatherman has seen 460 avian species in the state (and had a part in finding four first state record birds). That's an astounding 88.6 percent of the 519 species ever recorded in Colorado.

Leatherman is probably more famous in Colorado for his meticulous, passionate, 35 years of figuring out what birds here eat. Since 2010, he has answered that in his widely read "The Hungry Bird" column in *Colorado Birds*, the quarterly journal of Colorado Field Ornithologists. Between columns, Leatherman regularly regales readers of CFO's COBirds email list-serv with accounts of his frequent explorations (sometimes with photos of nearly microscopic creepy-crawlies) into what notable birds are eating.

Born in 1949 and raised in the shadow of Ohio State University's football stadium, he was interested in nature since childhood. He earned his bachelor's degree in biology from Marietta (OH) College and master's in forestry from Duke University. Father of three sons (four grandchildren), he counts the Blackburnian Warbler as his favorite bird. ("Right up there are crossbills, shrikes, Canyon Wren, vireos, pelagic species, and Merlin," he adds.) He also thinks Odell's 90 Shilling Ale "should be the official state microbrew."

"And if I could just find a cabin and bottle of whiskey," Leatherman adds, he plans to write a book about his more than 2,000 birds-and-bugs visits to Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins, his home patch. Working title: *Life Among the Headstones*.

Continued on page 10

Emma Riley and Northern Harrier

Hawk Watch 2022: Looking Back, and Forward

Emma Riley
Monday, November 28
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

Emma Riley was the full-time hawk counter and daily on-site coordinator during the two-month-plus spring 2022 season of DFO's Hawk Watch program. She will speak about national Hawk Watch efforts — where they are and why they matter — and present an update on the results and trends for Hawk Watch this year on Dinosaur Ridge.

Riley is a raptor biologist and naturalist with a degree in wildlife biology from Colorado State University. Since graduating, she has worked with Ferruginous Hawks in WY, breeding passerines across WY and ID, and more recently at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, MN during fall migration.

Raptor biology is her passion, especially migration and movement ecology. One of her "spark birds" is Ferruginous Hawk, and Dinosaur Ridge is considered the best place in America to see migrating "Ferruges" in spring.

When not birding, Riley enjoys snowboarding, mountain biking, and hanging out with her dog and two cats in Fort Collins, either at home or at a local brewery.

To register for this free Nov. 28 Zoom presentation, click this registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_D0y4fU4sSwKXFvpWuCMkNg

You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Riley's program as the date approaches.

Common Nighthawk
Jim Esten

Watchers on Dinosaur Ridge in April 2022
Allison Peters

HAWK WATCH

Hawktober? Join 3-part raptor ID series, and also an informal fall count @ Dino Ridge

Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO's popular Hawk Watch community science project, now a staple of the club's spring calendar, is adding some autumn spice this year with a three-part educational series featuring an in-person presentation, a Zoom webinar, and a trip into the field.

At the same time, an exploratory and informal fall raptor-counting effort involving DFO members has begun at the same watching post, Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County, where DFO's official Hawk Watch community science work takes place in spring.

More about that exploratory bird-of-prey count shortly, but first, more about DFO Hawk Watch's ambitious fall raptor series, which it collectively calls the Dinosaur Ridge Education Program. It will take place across one week in October, and participants can attend one, two or all three sessions.

It begins on **Saturday, Oct. 9**, with "Hawk Identification with Nature's Educators," an in-person presentation by that acclaimed Colorado wildlife outreach organization. The **1-3 p.m. MDT** event — in the Lois Webster Amphitheater of Denver Audubon's Kingery Nature Center just south of Chatfield State Park — will feature live examples of eight raptor species found along Colorado's Front Range. This up-close session will help participants learn how to identify each species in its perched position. It also will delve into habitat and conservation measures for these birds of prey. Participants will want to bring their cameras and questions for an encounter that will also provide a truer perspective of the size of these species. That's always a tricky ID marker for birds more often seen in flight or from a distance.

To register for "Hawk Identification with Nature's Educators," go to this link: https://dfobirds.org/Projects/Workshops.aspx. There is a modest $10 fee for this special event only, payable online via PayPal. At present, registration is open only to DFO members, but it is expected to be available for all.

Continued on page 12

HAWK WATCH *cont from page 11*

Three days later, **Dave Hill**, DFO's Hawk Watch Committee chair, will present "Hawks in Flight ID Skills," a hawk identification class via Zoom webinar. This free session **Wednesday, Oct. 12, at 7 p.m. MDT** is for birders of all skill levels. Participants will learn how to identify locally seen hawk species in flight using shape, plumage, and flight styles that distinguish each from the others. To register, go to this link: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_S_XAmkuST8GeTL0FJXsUOg.

Finally, three more days later, join your Hawk Watch hosts to practice your new skills at Dinosaur Ridge. This special morning outing is at the project viewing platform on **Saturday, Oct. 15, 9 a.m.-noon.** Join seasoned hawk watchers **Dave Hill, Mike Fernandez**, and **Ajit Antony** to spot and identify fall migrants heading south to their winter breeding grounds. The ridge, within the Morrison Fossil Area National Natural Landmark, is an iconic segment of the Dakota Hogback formation that runs the length of the Front Range from southern Wyoming to northern New Mexico. It is also home turf for Hawk Watch, where DFO leads the spring migration birds-of-prey count with the support of its partners: Denver Audubon, Colorado Field Ornithologists, Jefferson County Open Space, and the Hawk Migration Association of North America.

To register for this outing, please visit the "UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS" page on the DFO website at https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx and scroll down to the October listings. This field trip is reserved only for participants in this special three-part educational series.

Whether you are just looking to improve your raptor identification skills or want to serve as a volunteer hawk watcher in the 2023 spring migration count (March 1 to early May), DFO invites you to participate in one, two, or all three of these Dinosaur Ridge Education programs.

And if you're interested in helping a provisional autumn count being led now by Antony atop Dinosaur Ridge, read on. A hawk watcher from New York with 35 years of hawk-counting experience at three different watch sites, Ajit Antony just moved to Denver with his wife, **Liza**. Both joined DFO field trips several years ago while on an extended visit with local relatives. In late August, they made their first fall-migration visit to Dinosaur Ridge to look for southbound birds of prey.

Swainson's Hawk
Ian Stevenson

"I intuit that hawks should move south here in fall on north- and east-based winds because of the Front Range," Ajit Antony said in a letter that Hill posted to the CoBirds email list-serv in August. "There will be a learning curve for us" on wind direction, compass points, hawk flying elevations and migration time of day.

The Antonys invite anyone who wants to help. "Even if you don't know a lot about hawk ID, another pair of eyes to find hawks we might otherwise miss is useful," Ajit added in his CoBirds note. "It has been demonstrated repeatedly that the greater the number of observers at a site, the greater the number of hawks seen. (And) we can help you improve your ID skills." Hawk watchers with Colorado experience "would be especially welcome, for you can teach us the finer points in the ID of species we don't see in NY."

Should these autumn observations prove robust, it is conceivable that a fall migration count eventually could become part of DFO Hawk Watch. For now, it is an informal inquiry into the prospects.

To find out which days the Antonys plan to watch for raptors on Dinosaur Ridge from now through autumn, contact Ajit at aiantony@earthlink.net.

Bill Turner
Mark Brennan

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:
Up close with Bill Turner, DFO programs manager and a tour leader Down Under

Editor's note: IN THE SCOPE is a series of Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips and others who volunteer and participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email The Lark Bunting *at* patodrisk@gmail.com

Name:	**Bill Turner**
Home city:	**Centennial**
Age:	**82**
Occupation:	**Head, Denver Zoo Education Dept. (retired)**

How/when/where I became a birder?

Growing up in suburban Cleveland, I liked nature and was always bugging my parents to take me out to the country. At age 12, I got interested in reptiles after seeing a black rat snake caught by a Boy Scout on an outing with my older brother. My fascination became a passion. I studied and collected reptiles, joined a reptile club at the Cleveland Zoo, and earned a degree in zoology at Ohio State University. Other animals interested me, too, and I took note of the more familiar bird species.

But I didn't take up birding until the early 1970s. I had moved to Los Angeles in the mid-1960s to work for the city's new zoo. After a short stint as an animal keeper, I became the zoo's first reptile curator. I made friends among the docents there, and a couple of them were birders. Not long after I left the zoo in 1973, I had more time and they invited me out birding with them. It was an evolving thing, but soon I was hooked. I remember the time we drove well east of L.A. to the Morongo Valley area, a beautiful natural region on the west edge of the Mojave Desert. There, I saw a Vermilion Flycatcher for the first time, a very memorable moment. Henceforth, instead of just looking to the ground for reptiles, I began gazing upwards for birds.

When/how I got Involved with DFO?

After leaving the L.A. Zoo, I went back to school to earn a master's in education, with a community college credential. I still had a hankering to get back into the zoo business, but not as a reptile curator. In my search, I found that the Denver Zoo was looking for an educator. In 1977, I moved to Colorado to become the zoo's first paid education coordinator. Eventually I got involved in Denver Audubon, but my local birding was fairly casual because I was working full-time and had a family.

I didn't learn about DFO until after my retirement in 1999. With Tuesdays free, I got involved with the Tuesday Birders group, where someone told me about DFO. From the start I attended most of the regular monthly program meetings. It wasn't until 2017 that I became a volunteer. **Candice Johnson** from DFO's nominating committee recruited me to join the DFO Board and serve as monthly program manager, a role I've had ever since.

Continued on page 14

As LA Zoo reptile curator ca. 1967-68, accepting boy's pet Green Iguana
Mark Brennan

IN THE SCOPE *cont from page 13*

My favorite birding memory or moment?

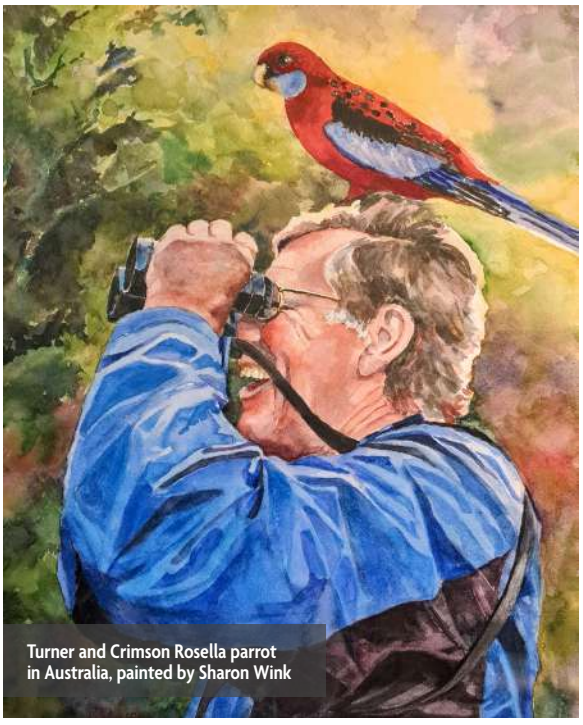
There are so many! For me, it would the early-morning encounter my 15-year-old son **Roger** and I had in Australia in 1994 with an Albert's Lyrebird. We were at a very famous birding hotspot, O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, inside Lamington National Park in southeast Queensland, less than 2 hours from Brisbane. Approaching with stealth, we were thrilled to see the large, long-legged male with a long, ribbon-like tail doing his rocking, dancing display on a tangled pile of vines in hopes of attracting a mate. This individual was so well-known there that birders had named him **George**. As if looks and behavior aren't enough, lyrebirds are expert mimics not only of other bird sounds but also chainsaws, car alarms and other human contraptions. The lyrebird was an encounter I'll never forget. And O'Reilly's, run by the same family for 96 years, remains my single favorite destination in Australia.

My favorite birding location, home or abroad?

Given my previous answer, you can probably guess. While I was on the Denver Zoo staff, I began to organize and lead nature trips on the side to Australia for zoo docents. After I retired in 1999, I formed my own tour company and expanded the travel to other stellar birding destinations: Costa Rica, Belize, Honduras, Brazil and New Zealand. After more than two dozen trips to Australia, most of them leading tours, it remains my favorite. But Costa Rica's rich biodiversity and great birding lodges are amazing, as is the vast Pantanal in Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay. It's the world's largest freshwater marsh (42 million acres, 20 times the size of the Everglades) and home to Hyacinth Macaws, Greater Rheas and endless waterbirds, not to mention jaguars and giant river otters.

Why the parrot on my head in the photograph?

That's actually a painting from a photo of me, both by **Sharon Wink**, a talented artist along on one of my Australia trips, sometime around 2005-2010. Yes, a Crimson Rosella parrot actually perched atop my head as I focused on another bird with my binoculars. This also happened at the O'Reilly's retreat. They have an area on their grounds where they allow visitors to feed the finches, parrots and other birds, usually just by holding out birdseed in your hands. My then-wife gave me Sharon's painting as a gift.



Turner and Crimson Rosella parrot in Australia, painted by Sharon Wink

My favorite bird species?

If forced to choose, I might pick kingfishers as a group, with my single favorite being the Azure Kingfisher of Australia (where else?). It is dainty, diminutive, and colorful. As a group, kingfishers are quite diverse. A lot of people don't know that, worldwide, particularly in Australia, many species of kingfisher are land birds and not tied to water at all. The four species of kookaburra in Australia and New

Continued on page 15

IN THE SCOPE *cont from page 14*

Guinea, for instance, are "terrestrial tree" kingfishers. My observations of various kingfisher species in the US, Australia, Thailand, Belize, Costa Rica and Brazil remind me of the good times I've had in those countries.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

Although my trips to Australia have taken me so many places in every direction of that vast continent, I've never been to the Kimberley. It's a remote, monsoonal region in northwestern Australia with sweeping sandstone cliffs, spectacular waterfalls, roaring rivers in the wet season, and ancient Aboriginal rock art. Emus, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos, Australian Bustards, Brolgas, Purple-crowned Fairy-wrens, and Estuarine (saltwater) Crocodiles await your arrival.

My birding philosophy?

There are many ways to experience nature. Birding is just one of them. Something we all can have in common is the peace, grounding, joy and sense of well-being found in the outdoors. We in DFO and other birding groups are well aware that habitats are under siege. Look no further than the outskirts of Denver and other Colorado cities for vivid examples: Ever-larger housing developments, water storage and commercial projects occupy places where we once saw Burrowing Owls, larger birds of prey, and much more native fauna and flora. Some of this is inexorable, given the population surge driven by Colorado's lifestyle appeal and natural beauty. DFO and other like-minded groups seek to preserve what we value, not only for birds and other wildlife, but for people, too. I hope we can all continue to support DFO and its work in education, conservation, advocacy and support of avian research.

I believe **Roger Tory Peterson** said birding can be many things to many people. You can find the same kinds of peace, grounding, joy and sense of well-being I mentioned above on local trips, especially those led by DFO. Although I was fortunate to travel abroad to enjoy unusual birds, you don't have to go to some exotic place to enjoy our pastime. We can get the same satisfaction in our backyards and farther afield, locally and anywhere else in America.

FOR SALE

SWAROVSKI 8X32 ELS

Swarovski 8x32 EL binoculars, $1,450
Four years old, excellent condition, purchased new for $2,050. Evaluated in July by Swarovski rep as "excellent." I bought this model for its light weight (21 ounces). A new eye condition requires me to upgrade to binoculars that admit even more light.
I am told the EL is particularly prized; the model has been discontinued and is only available on the used market. Includes suspender harness, unused neck strap, case, extra eyecup, manual, original box, and transferable warranty.

Contact Colleen Nunn at 303-520-7496.

DFO AdBIRDtisements!

DFO AdBIRDtisements are FREE ads in *The Lark Bunting* to seek or sell birding-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (works of art, photographs, note cards, posters, etc.). This includes materials donated for free.

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include a weblink if items offered online
- *The Lark Bunting* reserves the right to edit for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit). ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Ads available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: **last day of month** except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

To place a DFO AdBIRDtisement, email editor Patrick O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com. Next deadline: **Friday, Sept. 30**.

BIRDING HISTORY

The thrill of "discovering" new Denver birds in the century-old footsteps of a pioneer

W.H. Bergtold
Wikimedia Commons

Jared Del Rosso

In 2015, I became a "patch birder," focusing my outings near my central Denver apartment. Usually, this meant visiting Cheesman Park and Denver Botanic Gardens next door. In part, I did this to spend less time in my car and more time in the field. But I also did so because Cheesman and the Gardens were "underbirded," a term meant to describe locations with relatively few checklists on eBird.

At the start of 2015, fewer than 90 species had been reported to eBird from the two locations. This gave me the opportunity for one of the undisputed thrills of birding: To "discover" species in the middle of an urban center where many had yet to be recorded — in this case, central Denver.

So that spring, I visited both locations regularly — and I was rewarded with discovery after discovery. In April and May alone, I added 16 species to the list for the joint Gardens/Cheesman hotspot on eBird. In fall and winter, I added another 11. With fresh attention to this rather overlooked location, more birders joined in. By the end of 2015, the hotspot list had grown by one-third to more than 120 species. In the years since, birders have boosted the eBird checklist to 150.

Among these additions were many "good" birds for urban Denver: Red Crossbill, Common Poorwill, Brown Thrasher and Sage Thrasher. Philadelphia Vireo, a rarity, visited in September 2015, giving good looks to me and **Chris Rurik**, who identified it. In May 2017, **Rebecca LaRoche** found Virginia's and Black-throated Gray warblers, and in April 2018, both Long-eared Owl and Loggerhead Shrike on the same day! Suddenly, a tepid, back-burner destination on Denver's eBird map was hot.

So many of us rely on eBird to lead us to lifers, rarities and good birds — and yet, here in central Denver, hidden from eBirders for years, were at least 150 common, uncommon, and rare species.

I learned a couple of valuable lessons birding Cheesman and the Gardens in 2015: eBird is an imperfect guide to the reality of birds in our region . . . and there is a long history of birding in Colorado still awaiting rediscovery.

Digging into that history can help us understand how present-day finds are often avian species that have long visited our state and encountered its people — people like **William H. Bergtold**, whose century-old footsteps I found myself retracing in Cheesman Park.

Born in 1865, Bergtold lived and birded in central Denver more than a century ago. He came to Colorado, as I had, from the Northeast; we both grew up in upstate New York. For a time, he even worked for my current employer, the University of Denver, teaching in DU's medical school at the end of the 19th century.

Continued on page 17

The 2018 Long-eared Owl at Cheesman
Patrick O'Driscoll

BIRDING HISTORY *cont from page 16*

Digging around, I found an 1899 note in the journal *Science* that reported Bergtold was the first president of perhaps the first bird-related organization in the state, the Colorado Ornithological Association. Over the first three decades of the 20th century, he published numerous reports, articles, and books on Colorado's birds. Those writings led me to Bergtold. While looking for Cheesman's birds, I found one of the park's first birders, too.

Bergtold wrote one of the state's first books for birding, *A Guide to Colorado's Birds*. Through his articles, he did something further — he told stories of the times. In a 1921 article about the "English Sparrow" (now House Sparrow) and the rise of motor vehicles, he speculated that the transition to automobiles from horses in urban centers might reduce the population of that despised non-native bird. Not only would fewer horses mean fewer horse droppings for starving sparrows to comb for morsels, it would "probably also (make) the species' street life so hazardous and fatal as to drive it largely out of the business area" of downtown Denver. (Not entirely, but Bergtold was onto something.)

Focusing many of his reports on Denver and surrounding cities, he publicized other birders' accounts of uncommon and rare birds. Noteworthy was a pair of Northern Cardinals that apparently nested in Littleton for several years. Reading his reports today, I can't help but marvel at the city of a century ago — its natural and human-made landscapes, the birds that populated them, and the people who watched those birds.

"The Birds of Denver: An Annotated List," Bergtold's 1917 essay in *The Wilson Bulletin*, is riveting for what it tells us about bird diversity in Cheesman Park and around the city. Some species we take for granted today were far less numerous in his time — and others that were common here back then are scarcer now.

Writing about the then-uncommon American Crow, Bergtold spotted one "flying over Eleventh Avenue and Corona Street, December 7, 1913" and another "seen in Cheesman Park, May 1, 1917." In modern times, I have watched hundreds of crows fill the park, which seems to be a staging ground for overnight roosting in late autumn and winter. Spotted Towhee, a rather ubiquitous backyard sparrow these days, was even scarcer. On Jan. 1, 1913, Bergtold wrote, "One detected in Montclair," a Denver neighborhood 3 miles east of Cheesman. Black-capped Chickadees (in those days called Long-tailed Chickadees) hadn't even begun nesting in Denver but instead were merely "regular winter visitors," he noted.

His reports also reflect what Denver has lost to human alteration of once-natural landscapes. Pine Siskin was once a common spring nester in town, the bulk arriving "early in March, and many linger till June . . . probably going to higher altitudes to nest a second time." Bergtold tells us Black-headed Grosbeak and Bullock's Oriole were common breeders throughout Denver a century ago. Although less common, Lazuli Bunting and Northern Mockingbird both were regular summer breeders in the city, too. Although *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II* lists them all as breeders in Denver County, none seems as common in town as Bergtold suggests they once were.

One species I'm particularly fond of — Common Poorwill — continues to roost in the midst of others' losses and gains. Bergtold reported it as an infrequent migrant through Cheesman Park, and it still is today.

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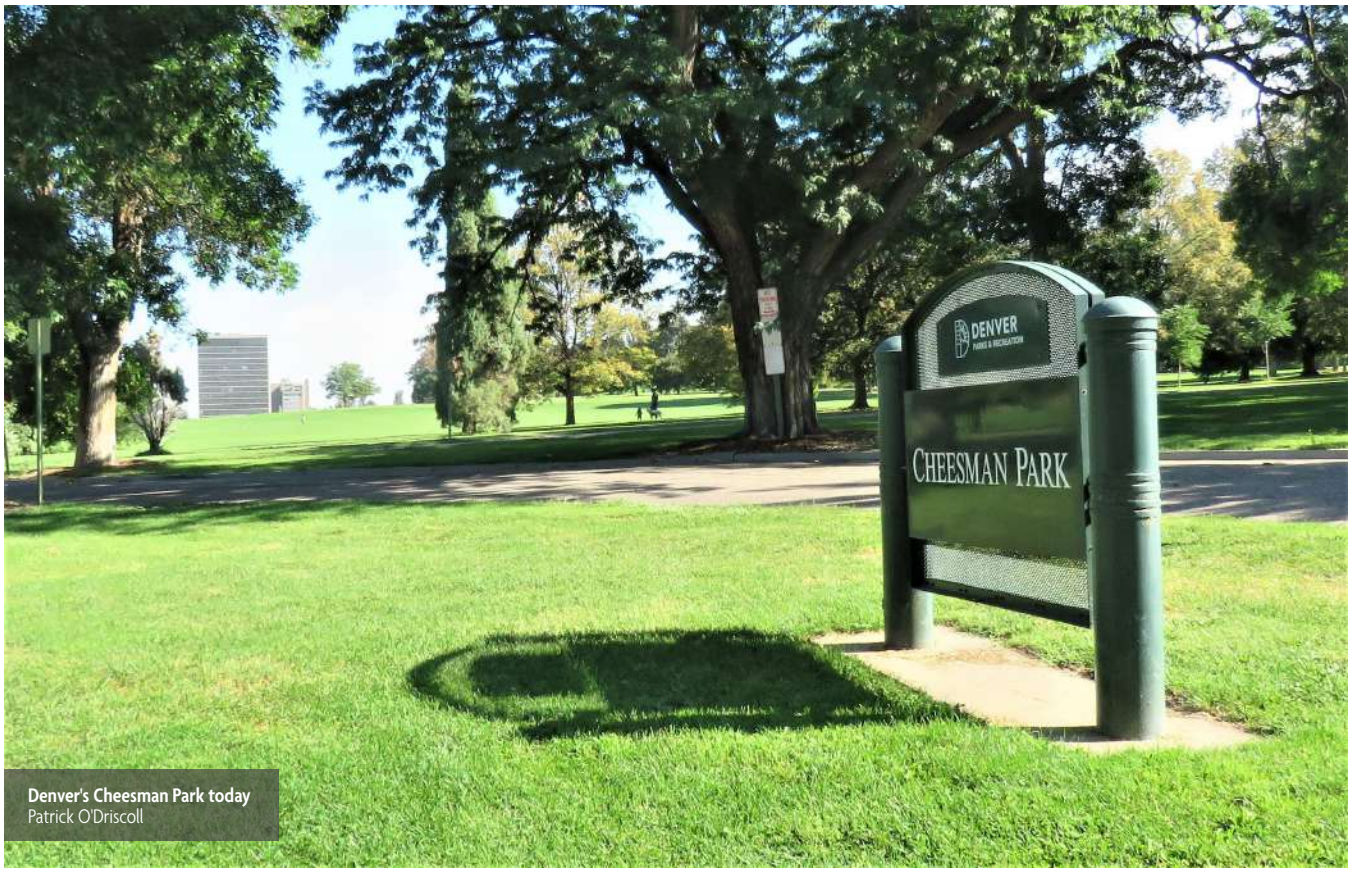

Denver's Cheesman Park today
Patrick O'Driscoll

BIRDING HISTORY *cont from page 17*

Having stalked through Cheesman a century after Bergtold, I like to think there was a connection between the poorwills we both encountered. I imagine that through decades and generations of humans and birds — then, now, and after us — the poorwills come and go, resting only occasionally in places like Cheesman where birders decide to look.

To read more by and about this pioneer Denver birder, consider these articles:

- "The English Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and the Motor Vehicle," W.H. Bergtold in *The Auk* (1921)
  https://www.jstor.org/stable/4073887

- "The Birds of Denver: An Annotated List," Bergtold in *The Wilson Bulletin* (1917)
  https://www.jstor.org/stable/4154774

- "In Memoriam: William Harry Bergtold," Albert Kenrick Fisher in *The Auk* (1937)
  https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/auk/v054n01/p0001-p0011.pdf

Jared Del Rosso has been birding since 2012. A sociologist who dabbles in nature writing, he's an occasional contributor to *The Lark Bunting* and to the Center for Humans and Nature's Stories & Ideas section. He blogs about birds at The Lonesome Whip-poor-will.

FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

From the Field: By the numbers, we are *very* busy birders

David Suddjian

Do you know how many free, public field trips Denver Field Ornithologists has led this year? We're on a record place. I'll let the numbers explain.

Through August, DFO has fielded 162 trips in 2022 — one outing every 1.4 days. Every week this year, we have conducted multiple field trips, some weeks nearly every day. For comparison, by this time in 2019 (our last full year of trips before the COVID pandemic), DFO had led 127 field trips. At this pace, we can expect 2022 to record more trips in one year than ever before . . . even in our 2018 "Big Year" that reset so many DFO birding records.

Our club's field trip program is unique. What other birding organization has a calendar of field outings as full as ours? Trip participants who visit other parts of the US talk about how few the opportunities are elsewhere for trips like ours. Some tell us that when they travel, they seek out active local birding clubs — and too often they find little activity and no outings to join during their visit.

Clearly, DFO is doing something different. Our trips are more frequent, more geographically varied and adventurous, easier to find and sign up for on the DFO website (and with detailed trip information), and open to anyone. Our difference shows in our singular measure of success: The many people who have enjoyed DFO trips to so many places in Colorado, and even beyond our borders. DFO's one out-of-state trip in 2022, a visit to northern New Mexico, won't be the last. It's a sign of more to come, this year and beyond.

Our trip leaders host LOTS of birders

How many individuals have joined DFO field trips? Most of our outings set a maximum number of people to ensure trip quality and manage logistics. So there ARE limits. But we offer so many field trips that many more birders can find available outings. As of Aug 21, 392 individuals had registered for and joined DFO field trips in 2022. This is a record turnout for any year — nearly 30 percent more individuals than by the same date in 2019. We expect by September to tally more than the entire 2019 roster of participants. What's more, many of our outings include people who are either first-timers or returning to DFO trips after some years away — and many of them keep coming back for more.

DFO's never-ending calendar of free field trips exists only because of our club's active and committed team of certified trip leaders. Thirty-two of them have led at least one trip so far in 2022, and 15 of them have led at least three. Twenty of them were in the field leading trips during a hot summer season. I cannot thank our leaders enough for sharing your love and excitement for birding, your knowledge of birds and places, and especially your time and attention to managing the trips you lead.

We find lots of BIRDS, too

We've seen many species in 2022: 319 in Colorado so far, our best year after the 2018 Big Year (362 total). So far, seven of this year's species were new for DFO in Colorado, and 2022 trips have ventured into 48 (of 64) Colorado counties so far. DFO also is making a substantial contribution to the eBird database. The club has submitted 1,017 complete eBird checklists in 2022, very close on the heels of our best-ever in the Big Year of 2018. Imagine: More than 1,000 checklists by September.

New species for DFO in 2022

- **Pyrrhuloxia**, Lakewood Gulch, Denver Co., Feb. 19
- **Slaty-backed Gull**, Horseshoe Reservoir, Larimer, March 26
- **Brown Pelican**, Chatfield SP, Jefferson, April 21
- **Common Gallinule**, Cross Creek Regional Park, El Paso, April 26
- **Scott's Oriole**, Clark Hill, Las Animas, June 13
- **Mexican Whip-poor-will**, undisclosed CO location, June 14
- **Cassia Crossbill**, Bailey Nesting Area, Summit, July 26

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Tresa Moulton studies shorebirds on DFO trip to Stagecoach SP on Aug. 19
David Suddjian

FROM THE FIELD *cont from page 19*

DFO also has reached the 100 total species milestone in six more Colorado counties in 2022. Chronologically, with 100th species and latest county total, they are:

- May 25: Kit Carson Co., Bullock's Oriole (now 106 DFO species)
- June 3: Gilpin, Black-and-white Warbler (109)
- June 4: Chafee, Black Phoebe (100)
- June 24: Custer, Cordilleran Flycatcher (111)
- Aug. 19: Routt, House Wren (119)
- Aug. 29: Grand, Eastern Kingbird (103)

Taking field trips forward

We've covered a lot of ground, but we look forward to a lot more. Even though most DFO trips take place across metro Denver and Front Range counties, we love going farther afield, too. Overnight trips inside the state, reaching in all directions, have been a regular presence on the DFO calendar since the 2018 Big Year.

We also want to lead a few out-of-state outings each year, with financial support from the DFO Board to help field trip leaders manage these more complex trips. Already under discussion are specific ideas for outings into New Mexico, Nebraska and Arizona — and perhaps even Mexico!

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FROM THE FIELD *cont from page 20*

Whether in or out of Colorado, overnight trips offer added benefits over our regular, shorter trips. The following are insights from regular DFO trip participants that might encourage you to join a future overnight excursion:

- DFO overnights are a great experience, as you see new places and revisit stunning vistas. Road trips with old and new friends with a focus!
- The experienced leader knows the area and has coordinated the logistics so we can spend more time enjoying birds and habitats
- A really fun way to explore unique places farther from the metro area. I can use my time more efficiently than on my own, and visit habitats and places I might not even know about. If I "dip" on a rarity on the first day, I often get a chance the next day to try again
- These trips let me venture to different habitats than we have locally, so I see different birds. We visit special places I wouldn't travel to by myself given the distances. The birds are great, but overnight trips are also a great way to get to know other birders better. People tend to open up more
- Because trips to farther-away hotspots require overnight stays, we are birding at the most productive early morning times, and we can try for special birds after dark
- Longer trips are opportunities to get to know others while driving and birding, but also in more leisurely settings (dinner and breakfast)
- If you often bird alone, an overnight group trip is a chance to bird safely with others at less familiar, faraway places
- An overnight with DFO can cost less than a full-service guided tour, since we are responsible for our own meals and accommodations, and we can share transportation costs

Thank you to these seven participants on DFO overnight trips this year for their comments (edited and sometimes blended for length): **Diane Roberts**, **Gary Witt**, **Ken Stuckey**, **Kathy Holland**, **Ann Larson**, **Nate Bond** and **Lorna Thomas**.

Field trippers in 2019
Patrick O'Driscoll

David Suddjian, Field Trip chair since August 2021, came to Colorado in 2013 from his native California. Since 2016, he has led well over 200 DFO outings, and he organized the club's 2018 "Big Year" (362 species on DFO trips).

AUGUST PROGRAM REVIEW

Hear that? It's Nathan Pieplow, playing the "Best Bird Sounds You've Never Heard"

Marc Strong

Colorado bird sound expert and author **Nathan Pieplow**, a frequent past presenter for DFO's monthly programs, opened our fall evening series on Aug. 22 with a highly entertaining presentation under an improbable title: "The Best Bird Sounds You've Never Heard."

From the outset, Pieplow said he considers Denver Field Ornithologists audiences "the hometown crowd" that gets "first dibs" on his brand-new talks. This one comprised 12 short stories, on a dozen mostly common bird species, that illustrate the three top excuses he hears when people say they've never heard the sound of those birds. Each example was accompanied by sometimes "blind" audio of a bird sound, followed by photos of the species that made it. Not included were the likely gasps of disbelief or delight among his far-flung audience of about 100 people watching the hour-long presentation live via Zoom.

View the complete video of "The Best Bird Sounds You've Never Heard" with Nathan Pieplow in the Past Programs archive on the Denver Field Ornithologists website: https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx

His first round of stories fell under the top excuse: "I sleep too late." Some birds, he explained, make an array of sounds in the middle of the night, and late risers will never hear them. First up were Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos, whose songs and other vocalizations a researcher with the American Prairie Reserve hoped to record in 2020 during the dawn chorus along the Upper Missouri River in Montana.

After setting up and leaving automatic recorders to do their job in remote locations, field biologist **Andy Boyce** belatedly realized they were set to the wrong time zone and would capture audio overnight instead of at dawn.

Without the resources to retrieve and reprogram his units, Boyce had to wait until season's end to retrieve them. Not expecting to hear much during playback, he was surprised to hear cuckoos' songs in abundance. By accident, said Pieplow, Boyce "made a huge discovery" that both cuckoos "actually vocalize more in the middle of the night than they do between 5 a.m. and 9 a.m." Pieplow shared similar stories of night vocalizers like Bicknell's Thrush and Violet-green Swallow, as well as the unexpected sound of the Short-eared Owl's wing-clap display.

Black Scoters and Pectoral Sandpipers illustrated Pieplow's tales of the second major excuse: "I'm too far south." Both are among species that make amazing sounds on their remote northern breeding grounds that we never hear from them when they winter here in Colorado. In the case of the scoter, a species that we think of as "little black dots out on a lake that don't make any sound at all" emits a "haunting double whistle" — but only on its Arctic breeding grounds.

The sandpiper, Pieplow said, is "mostly exciting for people who enjoy identifying hard-to-identify little brown birds," which is what they are down here. On the Alaskan tundra, though, Pectoral Sandpipers perform amazing vocal displays we never hear, puffing out an inflatable sack on their chest like sage grouse to make an "owl-like hooting sound."

Pieplow introduced the third most common excuse — "I expected prettier" — to gently chide those who weren't paying attention and missed a bird sound because they expected something more melodic or completely different. He illustrated this category of birds from those that make complex two-part songs to those with voiceless visual displays. Although the House Sparrow's song is a familiar one in Colorado, he revealed the intricate richness of its ordinary tune by slowing the playback to 40 percent of normal speed. The result: We hear the sparrow singing a duet with itself, thanks to the syrinx, a vocal organ whose twin sound-producing membranes allow birds to sing with two voices.

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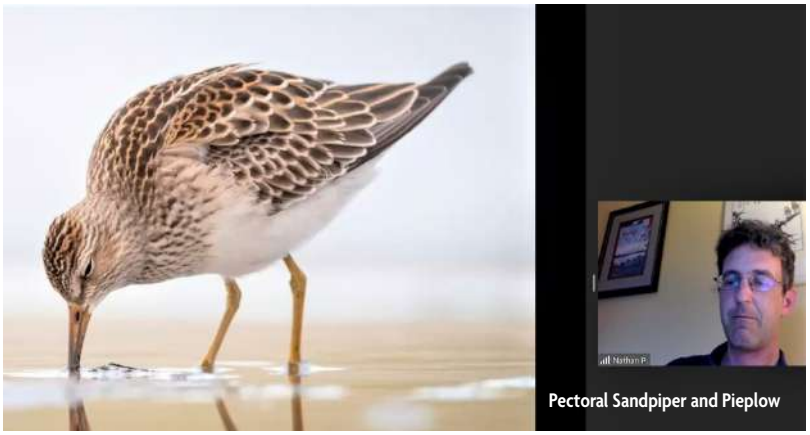
Screen grab from Zoom session

PROGRAM REVIEW *cont from page 22*

Many birds use only one, or use one for high notes and the other for low. The House Sparrow and some others can use them to sing melody and harmony together.

At the other end of the spectrum, Pieplow spoke of the voiceless "song" of the Brandt's Cormorant. As a family, cormorants "are not known for making a lot of sounds" beyond grunts, so on coastal breeding grounds where loud surf and other noise can block out songs and sounds, Brandt's Cormorants rely on a vibrant blue throat patch in breeding season to visually "sing" to potential mates. By this and other examples, Pieplow broadened listeners' idea of sound by showing that birds also make sounds with their wings, bills or tails and that bird "sounds" can include visual displays.

With each story, Pieplow invited the audience to listen to birds in new, exciting ways. His engaging style invited active participation as he answered audience members' questions and quizzed them on bird identification by means of Zoom's chat function for their responses — and respond they enthusiastically did.


Pectoral Sandpiper and Pieplow

Nathan Pieplow on Zoom

Marc Strong, who joined DFO in 2021, is a lab tech by day and grad student in science writing by night. His grandmother taught him to love watching birds, and now, he endeavors to write about them.

FIELD TRIPS

Field Tripping: A "developing birder" stroll through Belmar

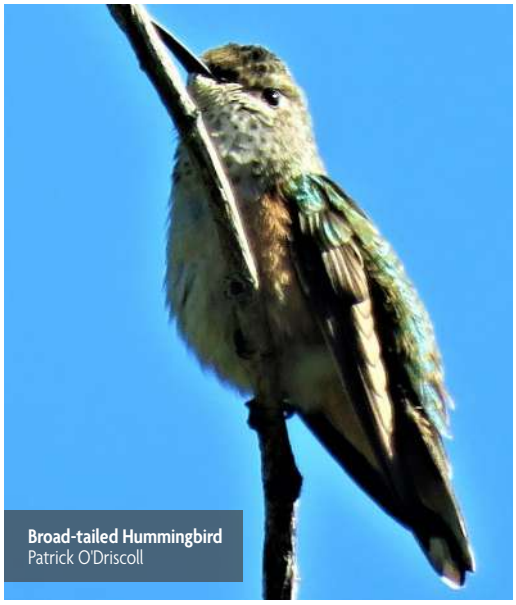
The trip: Belmar Park, Lakewood (Jefferson County)
Date: Wednesday, August 17, 2022
Leader: Gary Witt (co-leader David Suddjian) + 7 participants
Species: 31 on single eBird checklist (https://ebird.org/checklist/S117109787)

Snowy Egret
Anne Craig

Continued on page 25

Belmar trip group pauses to listen
Patrick O'Driscoll

Belted Kingfisher
Patrick O'Driscoll



Broad-tailed Hummingbird
Patrick O'Driscoll

Patrick O'Driscoll
So, what level birder are you? Beginner? Intermediate? Expert? Somewhere in between?

How about "developing"? As DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** said when introducing the concept of "Developing Birder" trips last November, *everyone* is a developing birder in some respect. The club has led such trips 15-20 times since then, and each trip leader has taken a somewhat different approach. Suddjian, who has led most of them, has emphasized "taking more time to learn" when certain birds and opportunities arise, as well as being "especially receptive to questions so folks feel comfortable and know it is OK to ask." Other trips have focused on themes — specific species or kinds of birds, breeding, habitat, even how to approach birding an area. It might also depend on the group's mix of birding abilities.

For **Gary Witt**, leader of this Belmar Park trip, pausing to listen was a key — to "think in terms not only of visual clues. There's a lot more to identifying and understanding those birds" than what we see, he said. As the group set out, he added that they were "just going to stop and listen" at times, and "not just get out our Merlin (sound ID) apps right away. Just stop and listen."

On a sunny and pleasant morning, the group paused now and then to do so over the next three hours. Sharp-eyedness was not abandoned altogether. From the start, Cooper's Hawks, a Broad-tailed Hummingbird, a Spotted Sandpiper and a female Belted Kingfisher were sussed out of the trees and lakeshore foliage by sight. But invisible chickadees, sparrows, nuthatches and others were ID'd when and wherever their calls invited closer listening.

Fortunately, the park setting cooperated. Belmar is fairly quiet for being so near Lakewood's town center. Described as "one of the true jewels" of the city's parks, Belmar's 132 rolling acres are about one-sixth of what was once a 1930s country estate and home to philanthropist **May Bonfils Stanton**, a reclusive heiress to *The Denver Post* fortune. (The park's close neighbor, Irongate Executive Plaza, takes its name from a remnant of the Belmar mansion — the still-standing entryway of wrought iron and Carrara marble.)

The morning-long trip produced a well-above-average count, mostly of familiar local species, just before the fall migrants begin to show up. There were no big surprises or early autumn arrivals, but a few highlights, nonetheless. A trio of Western Wood-Pewees played hide-and-seek from the group in trees above the marshy, boomerang-shaped pond that oxbows to the northwest of Kountze Lake. A fresh pair of fledged Western Kingbirds waited on a cottonwood's leafless upper branch for a parental food delivery.

Continued on page 26

FIELD TRIPPING *cont from page 25*

On this Developing Birder trip, the group was somewhat mixed: one expert (Suddjian, accompanying Witt on his first outing as a trip leader), three intermediates, a few newer, and one longer-time birder who'd been away from the field and "out of practice."

That was **Jessica Sushinsky**, a Denver biologist looking to get up to speed with the local birdlife after a decade or so away from organized birding. "Books and listening are fine, but it's nice to have other people (with you) who know the species. I don't know my species here very well yet," said Sushinsky, who had lived and birded in Australia and New Orleans but only casually focused on neighborhood birds since moving to Denver in 2014. A Google search for bird outings landed her on the DFO webpage, and the "Developing Birder" description appealed.

Does that appeal to you? Look for the words "Developing Birder Trip" in the individual listings on the "Upcoming Field Trips" page of the DFO website, at https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx. Then click the "DETAILS" button on the left to learn more about the leader's approach for that trip. There are at least three such trips scheduled for the latter half of September, and no doubt more to follow.

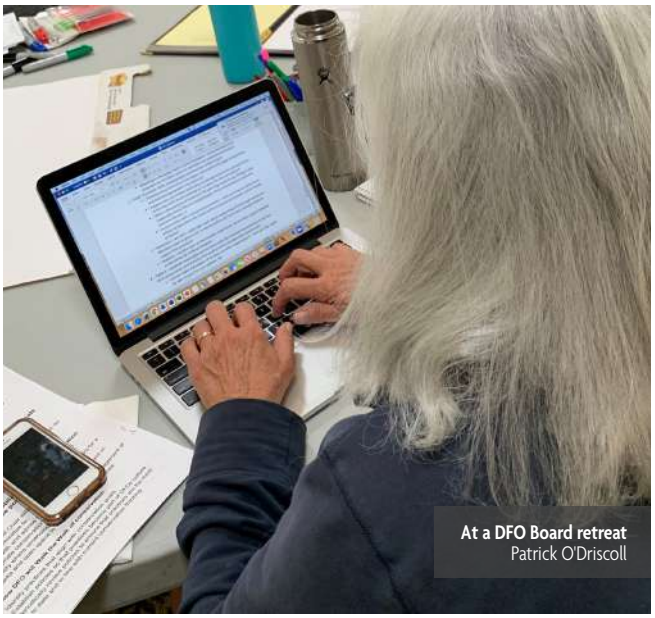
Cooper's Hawk
Patrick O'Driscoll

Say's Phoebe
Anne Craig

DFO NEWS

Club Quarterly: DFO business update

Editor's note: The DFO Board meets four times a year. The Lark Bunting *will publish this quarterly synopsis after those February, May, August and November meetings. Full minutes and financial reports are available to DFO members only on club website at https://dfobirds.org/Members/Business.aspx.*



At a DFO Board retreat
Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO BOARD AUGUST MEETING

The board met on Aug. 13, 2022, at the nature center in Barr Lake State Park. Fifteen of the 17 directors and officers attended.

FINANCE

Treasurer **Kathy Holland** reported financial profit and loss were "within expectations." She presented a mock-up of a new profit-and-loss spreadsheet to organize budget and expenditures by committee categories instead of lumped under general headings. The board will adopt the 2023 budget at its next meeting (November), with a final reminder for committee funding requests 3-4 weeks before.

FIELD TRIPS

The revised format for field trip posting and registration works well and is more flexible for leaders and participants, chair **David Suddjian** said. He proposed rewarding active trip leaders' volunteer work with $25 gift cards. The board voted to set aside up to $700 for this in 2022. Suddjian also proposed partial reimbursement for lodging/meals of trip leaders who plan and lead overnight and out-of-state DFO outings. The board voted to allocate up to $400 (not to exceed $200 a day) for such trips in 2022.

The board voted to discontinue the annual spring and fall bird counts. Principal reason: Extensive species data already gathered by eBirders daily and year-round at locations where the counts have been conducted. (*See DFO News Notes on page 5 of this issue for more details.*)

HAWK WATCH

At the request of committee chair **Dave Hill**, the board passed a "vote of confidence" for greater financial support in 2023 for the daily spring count of migrating raptors at Dinosaur Ridge. As in 2022, Hawk Watch seeks to pay a full-time counter to lead the effort. The committee may seek up to $5,000 in DFO support depending on other donations. The board will not commit to a specific amount until November budget meeting. Vice president **Sharon Tinianow** said Better Birding Skills Committee has discussed having a raptor identification workshop led by Hill.

CONSERVATION

Committee chair **Steve Ryder** discussed renewed attention to future birding at Chico Basin Ranch as the State Land Board considers new "layered" leases when the current ranch lease expires at the end of 2024. Even if present bird-friendly lessee Ranchlands wins next ranching lease, land board staff does not favor continuing present open-gate policy for year-round birding. Board discussed meeting soon with Aiken Audubon in Colorado Springs (closest birding group to the ranch) to explore if it's feasible to carry a lease (likely at high cost) to preserve, at minimum, spring and fall migration birding at the state's most prolific eBird hotspot.

COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

Committee aims to update DFO's out-of-date, glossy trifold brochure, possibly as a 2-sided "rack card" to display at birding stores, tourist and park visitor centers and the like. *The Lark Bunting* newsletter plans to publish an ad campaign this fall to

Continued on page 28

DFO Board retreat
Patrick O'Driscoll

promote membership renewal and year-end, tax-deductible giving to DFO's donation funds. With fewer than 10 paid subscribers to the black-and-white, printed-paper version of the newsletter, printing will cease after the December 2022 issue.

Other C&O business: Updates on DFO website, the club's online merchandise store, volunteer staffing needs for our Instagram page, introduction of the new archivist at Denver Museum of Nature & Science (repository for DFO's archives) and outreach to non-members.

GRANTS

One of six grant recipients for 2022 has not yet put its funds to use. "Bird Nerds Camp" by Evergreen Audubon cited lack of participants this year, but Grants chair **Elaine Wagner** said its $1,225 award will be carried over for use in 2023. President **Susan Blansett** said she has talked with Colorado Field Ornithologists about potential cooperation to streamline grant application for both clubs' research-and-education grant programs.

MEMBERSHIP

Blansett said chair **Sue Summers** plans to resign after seeking to recruit a replacement. The board discussed time-intensive nature of membership-renewal season (repeated reminders and even phone calls to those whose memberships lapse into the new year).

PROGRAMS

Programs manager **Bill Turner** noted the full list of four fall 2022 programs is available for Zoom registration; advance stories on each are in the newsletter. He asked for board members to suggest more ideas for future speakers, with a particular emphasis on greater diversity in presenters of color.

NEW BUSINESS

Hawk Watch

Member **Mary Cay Burger** suggested that DFO seek out members who might have a spare bedroom for weeknight lodging for Hawk Watch lead counter **Emma Riley**. In 2022, she had to commute from Fort Collins.

Diversity

Turner raised the question of working harder to increase racial diversity within DFO. Blansett said the board made this a key goal in the strategic plan adopted not long before the COVID-19 pandemic shut everything down. Discussion touched on taking DFO outreach events (pop-up observatories in parks, beginning birder field trips, etc.) to predominantly minority neighborhoods (e.g., Montbello and North Park Hill in Denver). Tinianow suggested outreach to outdoor groups of color might be a productive first step. The board discussed creating a cache of inexpensive but good quality binoculars (several models at or under $85) that could bridge the affordability gap for young and diverse new birders at such DFO events.

Volunteers

Tinianow proposed to examine at a future meeting how DFO can better recruit, train and retain volunteers, a need that the club has frequently struggled to fill.

Before we go . . .

An October photo gallery

Glimpses from the field
by Jim Esten, photo editor

Left: **Virginia Rail**
Top right: **Yellow-breasted Chat**
Bottom right: **Black-headed Grosbeaks**

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	$	_____
Hawk Watch donation (DFO community science)	$	_____
Total	$	_____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____
(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:
Kathy Holland, 351 E Caley Ave, Centennial, CO 80121-2201

THE LARK BUNTING
6350 S Havana St, Apt 1212
Englewood, CO 80111-5660

THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 58 | ISSUE 11 | NOVEMBER 2022

DFOBIRDS.ORG

FROM THE FIELD

The fine folks who lead our bands of birders

PAGE 19

AJIT + LIZA ANTONY "IN THE SCOPE"

50 years with birds, from Bombay to New York to DFO

PAGE 13

DFO NEWS NOTES

Hawktober! "Bird Bombs"! Brazil! Grasslands now!

PAGE 7

FIELD GALLERY

What *were* they looking at? Find out, in back

PAGE 20

PHOTO OF THE MONTH »

American Robin

Anne Craig

Bear Creek Greenbelt Lakewood

ON THE COVER

A new DFO trip leader, **Anne Craig** has lived and worked in Florida and Japan. She especially enjoys birding her "patch" (Bear Creek Greenbelt between Estes and Kipling streets) with camera in hand. She keeps her bird photos on her blog naturallyjax.com.

American Robin: More than just that omnipresent harbinger of spring

In the taken-for-granted category of too-common species, is there any bird lovelier and more familiar where we humans live, work and play than the American Robin? In his book, *What the Robin Knows*, **Jon Young** describes it as "America's favorite songbird." I suppose some birders might argue with that, but why?

The American Robin is the largest, most abundant and widespread thrush in North America, for what that's worth. One source suggests it's the continent's most abundant bird, period: 370 million individuals, more than one for every American and Canadian. They're so familiar to birder and non-birder alike that they're a familiar point of comparison when describing or judging bird size: "Smaller and skinnier than a robin" or "Between a robin and a pigeon" or "Almost robin-sized but kinda angry-looking."

Turdus migratorius (Latin for "migratory thrush") is everywhere. Its range covers every part of North America except Mexico's Pacific Coast and south, and a far northern sliver of Canada's Northwest Territories. It's as comfortable nesting on the Arctic tundra as it is pulling earthworms like rubber bands from your front lawn, where it IS the proverbial early bird that catches the worm. Worms and insects are its sustenance in spring and summer, but in fall and winter, the American Robin favors all kinds of fruit, whether dining alone or in a migratory flock of hundreds or even hundreds of thousands.

That's one reason why this month's cover photographer, **Anne Craig**, found this ordinary bird in a tree full of fruit in her birding patch — the stretch of Bear Creek Greenbelt between Estes and Kipling streets in Jefferson County. (A new DFO trip leader, she also led her first trip there.)

The cover bird was "in a small clump of trees that has been fruitful (literally!) for the three years I've lived here in Colorado," said Craig, who listed an array of other species she's found in that thicket. "House Finches are a usual fixture there, as are Blue Jays and Black-capped Chickadees. At the start of the year, White-crowned Sparrows claimed (the clump) . . . sometimes joined by a Harris's Sparrow. In late spring, a male Broad-tailed Hummingbird claimed the territory for weeks. This summer, for a couple of weeks straight, I routinely saw Say's Phoebes and their young. I've seen Brewer's Sparrows there recently; in past years I've seen Lark Sparrows alight there."

Back to American Robins: Here's a fun fact from the Cornell Lab. Robins that eat lots of honeysuckle berries sometimes get drunk on them. And if you're seeing lots of nests all through spring and summer, you're not drunk, either. Robins can have two and sometimes even three successful broods in a year. Perhaps they're making up for the 60 percent of nests that don't successfully produce young robins (says the Cornell Lab, too).

For the record, American Robins aren't all as migratory as their scientific name suggests. Some spend all winter where they breed. Range maps paint their nesting grounds across Canada's far north, but we've all seen nests around town, where the gray heads and yellow bills of egg-sitting moms protrude in classic profile. Not long after, those nests will contain begging chicks, yellow mouths agape for the next morsel.

Continued on page 3

ON THE COVER *cont from page 2*

This species is embedded in our popular culture, too. What's the name of that staple pastel color at the paint store? Oh yeah, Robin's Egg Blue. (First described as a color, by the way, in 1873.)

My favorite cultural reference is "First Sign of Spring," a 2013 newspaper cartoon by *Bizarro Comics* artist **Dan Piraro** of a kitchen-table couple, mugs of morning coffee in hand, gazing out the window at a familiar Robin peeking from behind a tree. Still cracks me up every time.

Patrick O'Driscoll, a DFO member since 2014, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads field trips (his patch is Denver City Park) and has been editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020.

Like almost every bird species (not to mention all life on Earth), American Robins are threatened by climate change and severe weather. But given their vast numbers and immovable niche in American culture, it's a safe bet that for some time to come, as the old song goes, the *Red, Red Robin* will continue to *Come Bob, Bob, Bobbin' Along*.

— Patrick O'Driscoll

Got merch? DFO does! Get it online

Items with the colorful Denver Field Ornithologists logo — Caps, T-shirts, water bottles and more — are available at the "Official DFO Shop" on Zazzle, a print-on-demand service. Items come in tons of colors and sizes up to 2XL. Proceeds will help support DFO projects like Hawk Watch, the Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund, and general club operations.

To visit the shop, click this link: https://www.zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop

The Lark Bunting newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists is published monthly except for joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submit original articles to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. Editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any such materials.

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DFO? It's me.

. . . ON INSPIRATION AND SHARING

As a boy in Taiwan, I painted sparrows as an exercise in Chinese ink painting. But I had never painted birds as a birder. On my first DFO trip, the other birders shared their knowledge, inspiring me to paint not just for fun, but to learn. Now after a trip, I paint the bird that touched me the most. It reinforces what I saw — and when I share it on Facebook, I hope it inspires you to share the wonder of birds.

JOE CHEN
Member since 2018

DFO: It's ALL of us

To renew your membership or to join Denver Field Ornithologists for 2023 (includes the rest of 2022 free), and also to make tax-free, year-end contributions, visit https://dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx

dfo
DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Season of the witches — or glitches? Just in case, DFO superheroes are on speed-dial

Susan Blansett

Repeat after me: DFO is NOT haunted . . . it just seems a little like it lately. Spooky happenings in recent days have reminded me to be watchful against the powers of darkness, be they otherworldly puzzlements or very worldly mischief makers.

Luckily for us, Denver Field Ornithologists has troubleshooters on hand. In a Halloween season of dressing up like caped crusaders, we are thankful for two guardians of our own little galaxy.

First, the DFO website crashed most unexpectedly on Friday afternoon, Sept. 23, threatening to leave members and fans of our world-class field trip program outside trying to look in. Quickly to the rescue came DFO's longtime, Iowa-based webmaster, **Ann Johnson**. Virtual cape billowing, Ann swooped in to save the day with a temporary web address, restoring peace and harmony until we could get www.dfobirds.org back in the air again almost a week later.

Then, while we were dealing with our website glitch (thought to be a server issue), several disruptors tried to drop inappropriate question-bombs into Ted Floyd's DFO Zoom program on the evening of Monday, Sept. 26 (*see the program review on page 16 in this issue*). Our hawk-eyed Zoom guru, **Peter Stolz**, spidey-sense fully engaged as he monitored the Q&A queue, spotted — and quickly dispatched — the offensive questions and the five individuals who dropped them, before they could disrupt the proceedings.

Thanks to Ann and Peter for keeping our DFO communications channels open and civil in a busy season not only for migrating birds but also for club activities. There's lots more in DFO's trick-or-treat bag this season. Read on . . .

Hawktober is under way! Assuming you read this as soon as it arrives, it's not too late to join in the fun and learning of our three-part raptor identification education event: The in-person workshop on birds of prey Sunday, Oct. 9 with Nature's Educators at Denver Audubon's Kingery Nature Center (south of Chatfield SP); **Dave Hill**'s popular and free "Hawks in Flight ID Skills" webinar Wednesday, Oct. 12; and the fall raptor migration event Saturday, Oct. 15 on Dinosaur Ridge with several of DFO's crack hawk ID experts. (*For more details and registration links, see the item at the top of "DFO News Notes" on page 7 of this issue.*)

Conservation issues come in all flavors. Here are three of note this fall:

- **Chico Basin Ranch.** Conversations continue about the uncertain future of Colorado's birdiest hotspot (and a favorite DFO field trip destination). In 2021, DFO and other bird organizations persuaded the State Land Board, which controls the state-owned ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties, to treat birding there as a scientific activity (because of innumerable eBird checklists), not just a recreational one. Still, the land board's staff is pushing hard to finalize a "layered lease" that could highly restrict future birding when a new livestock and agriculture lease takes effect in 2025. DFO, Colorado Field Ornithologists and Aiken Audubon in Colorado Springs are in discussions about what birders can do. Look for an in-depth update on this vital issue in our next newsletter

- **Park Hill Golf Course.** The multiyear saga of how to redevelop the defunct golf course's open-space tract in northeast-central Denver is politically charged, including an overwhelming public "yes" vote for preservation. City negotiations with developers have led to a draft redevelopment plan that the Denver Planning Board will consider at a public hearing **Wednesday, Oct. 19 at 3 p.m.** At issue are the miniscule amount of parklands in northeast Denver compared with elsewhere in the

Continued on page 6

city and whether the developers' pledge to create open space is sufficient and binding. DFO's Conservation Committee is following the issue and welcomes member comment and feedback. For more information, go to this link:

https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Community-Planning-and-Development/Planning/Plans-in-Progress/Park-Hill-Golf-Course#section-1

- **Cats + Birds.** My column in last month's newsletter about bird depredation by feral and free-roaming domestic cats drew sharp feedback from an alternate point of view by DFO member and ardent cat lover **Audrey Boag**. We are reprinting Audrey's letter and my response on page 11 in hopes of sparking more conversation that can help DFO contribute to better outcomes for both beloved species

Before closing, a word about renewing your membership (in case you missed the full-page "*DFO: It's ALL of Us*" reminders in last month's and this month's issues). Yes, it's renewal time. Plus, any new member signing up after Oct. 1 gets the benefit of full membership for the rest of 2022 and all of 2023. And at just $25 for an individual or family membership, ours is the best deal going.

Whether you're a first-timer or a long-timer, please also consider adding a year-end donation to DFO's Research, Education and Grants Fund, to Hawk Watch, or to the DFO General Fund. All of these assist in our ongoing work to encourage greater appreciation among everyone of birds and their habitats.

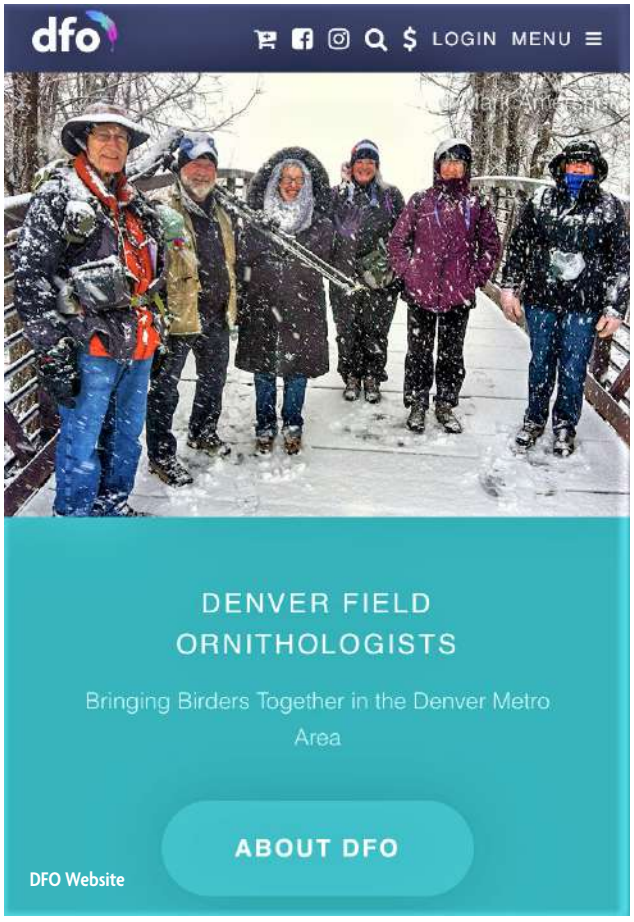
Thank you, and Happy Halloween to all!

— Susan

Susan Blansett, club president since 2021, has volunteered in numerous committee roles and as an officer since joining the DFO Board in 2016. She became a field trip leader this year. Susan works for the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

Chico Basin Ranch
Patrick O'Driscoll

Park Hill Golf Club
Patrick O'Driscoll



DFO Website

DFO NEWS

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share them: club news, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life (and life bird!) events, and any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany. Send your items, photos and any questions to* ***Patrick O'Driscoll*** *at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

Swainson's Hawk
Ian Stevenson

LAST CALL: ARE YOU SIGNED UP FOR DFO'S HAWKTOBER EVENTS?

Assuming you read this before **Sunday, Oct. 9**, there's still time to register for the first part of DFO's special three-part education series on raptor identification and appreciation: an in-person presentation, a Zoom webinar, and a trip into the field. Even if you miss the first installment that day, there's still plenty of time to join in the second and third events.

That first session, "Hawk Identification with Nature's Educators," is an in-person presentation by that acclaimed Colorado wildlife outreach organization. The **1-3 p.m. MDT** event at the amphitheater in Denver Audubon's Kingery Nature Center (just south of Chatfield State Park at 11280 Waterton Road, Littleton) features live examples of raptor species found along Colorado's Front Range. Participants get to see these magnificent birds of prey up close. Registration for DFO members is at this link: https://dfobirds.org/Projects/Workshops.aspx. For non-members, click on this link: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/hawk-identification-with-natures-educators-tickets-413753045497. For this event only, there is a modest $10 fee for DFO members, $12 for non-members.

Three days later, **Dave Hill**, DFO past president and Hawk Watch Committee chair, will present "Hawks in Flight ID Skills," a raptor ID class via Zoom webinar. This free session **Wednesday, Oct. 12, at 7 p.m. MDT** is for birders of all skill levels. To register, go to https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_S_XAmkuST8GeTL0FJXsUOg.

Finally, three more days later, participants in one or both of these sessions will be invited to practice their new skills in a special morning field trip at Dinosaur Ridge. This outing on **Saturday, Oct. 15, 9 a.m.-noon MDT** features seasoned hawk watchers Dave Hill and **Ajit Antony**.

BIRD BOMBS AWAY! HERE ARE MORE NEW ID MINI-WORKSHOPS

The autumn-winter array of DFO's Bird Bombs, short webinars (about 30 minutes) for field identification of seasonal species, keeps growing. Here are three new ones scheduled for December and January:

- *Better Duck: Winter duck identification*, **Friday, Dec. 9 at 7 p.m. MST**. Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_5UudDTlhRW6i8iEQBGCLLw
- *First State Record!: A crystal ball look at the next new Colorado species*, **Thursday, Dec. 29, 7 p.m. MST**. Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_3JoyJDFhT1-gfRbEaT0i4A
- *Mountain Finches: Rosy-finches, grosbeaks, and other mountain seedeaters*, **Thursday, Jan. 12, 2023, 7 p.m.** MST. Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_gbxN70tHTp2rpU-dlS0f9Q

And here's a reminder that it's not too late to sign up for the next two sessions in October and November:

Continued on page 8

- *Looking at Loons: Fall and winter visitors*, **Thursday, Oct. 13, 7 p.m. MDT**. Register at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_7imNtwMZSVqOfpBzR8GR5w
- *Forest Hawks: Identifying our Accipiters*, **Thursday, Nov. 17, 7 p.m. MST**. Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_dCqJ5q0BSeq6tzt2TZ5xaw

Bird Bombs are "bursts of bird ID info" on focused topics. If you cannot attend a session live, the Zoom recording for it will be posted afterwards (as are all other previous sessions) on DFO's past-programs archive at https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx.

NEXT STOP: BRAZIL? AN OLD DFO FRIEND SEEKS FELLOW TRAVELERS

If northeastern Brazil is on your list of birding destinations, former DFO officer and board member **Norm Erthal** of Arvada is organizing a three-week excursion in 2023 (Feb. 28-March 21) for up to eight participants. Erthal, club president three decades ago (1991-93), plans stops at Araripe National Forest, Chapada Diamantina, Canudos Biological Station, Crato Forest, Boa Nova Reserve, Veracel Reserve, and Serra Bonita Reserve, among others. Having led trips abroad to more than 15 countries, he promises "an excellent guide from Brazil and . . . a comfortable bus." Potential species list? "Well over 600," he says. For full details, contact Erthal at nerthal@comcast.net.

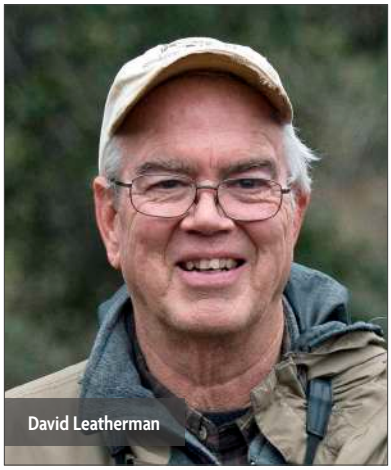
RESTORE THE GRASSLANDS! LONG-OVERDUE BILL NEEDS CONGRESS TO ACT

According to the American Bird Conservancy, more than half the grassland birds in the US and Canada have disappeared since 1970. These losses include significant drops in popular Colorado species including Burrowing Owl and Western Meadowlark, among others, and the already scarce Northern Bobwhite along the far eastern edge of our state. The native prairie they need to survive and thrive continues to vanish. In a bid to reverse the losses, the North American Grasslands Conservation Act was introduced in July in the US Senate. It would create a science-based strategy and incentives to conserve grassland ecosystems across the continent.

ABC and dozens of conservation groups and native tribes want birders to join in asking our US senators to support the Grasslands Act and help restore critical and shrinking ecosystems. Vast prairies, abundant with wildlife, once covered almost half the country. Today, only pockets of the tallgrass and shortgrass prairie remain. Unsustainable management practices and land-use changes across vast tracts — including conversion of 51.3 million acres of grassland to cropland in the Northern Great Plains since the 1800s — can no longer be ignored.

Besides helping birds and wildlife, the act would reward Plains farmers and ranchers for sustainable practices. It also would fight climate change by increasing carbon sequestration and making prairies more resilient to prolonged drought and other environmental threats. To add your voice in support of the Grasslands Act, go to this ABC link to endorse its letter or draft your own message to our US senators: https://act.abcbirds.org/a/take-action-grasslands-act.

Burrowing Owl
Jim Esten


David Leatherman

Life History of the Best Tree in Our World

David Leatherman
Monday, October 24
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

When **David Leatherman** — curious birder, expert bugman, exacting photographer and deft wordsmith — told us the subject of his DFO evening presentation, he described it with this riddle:

"They smell like vanilla, sport dimples in their bark, feed pine beetles, house Pygmy Nuthatches, inspired **Albert Bierstadt**, frame the Front Range, fuel ferocious fires and comfort squirrels with tufted ears."

They are Ponderosa pines, Leatherman continued, "the best tree in our world." Sign up for his free Zoom presentation for what's sure to be an entertaining defense. His talk will "celebrate the natural history of this wonderful tree, featuring the diverse birdlife among its boughs."

A veteran of numerous previous DFO presentations, Leatherman served more than three decades as the forest entomologist for the Colorado State Forest Service (1974-2005). Out of his deep background in insects that draw birds into Colorado's forests, Leatherman has seen 460 avian species in the state (and had a part in finding four first state-record birds). That's an astounding 89.3 percent of the 515 species ever recorded in Colorado.

To sign up for this free Oct. 24 Zoom presentation, click this registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_kCjMM8bCTxy7h9hNJFvdsg

You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Leatherman's presentation as the date approaches.

Leatherman is probably more famous in Colorado for his meticulous, passionate, 35 years of figuring out what birds here eat. Since 2010, he has answered that in his widely read "The Hungry Bird" column in Colorado Birds, the quarterly journal of Colorado Field Ornithologists. Between columns, Leatherman regularly regales readers of CFO's COBirds email list-serv with accounts of his frequent explorations (sometimes with photos of nearly microscopic creepy-crawlies) into what notable birds are eating.

Born in 1949 and raised in the shadow of Ohio State University's football stadium, he was interested in nature since childhood. He earned his bachelor's degree in biology from Marietta (OH) College and master's in forestry from Duke University. Father of three sons (four grandchildren), he counts the Blackburnian Warbler as his favorite bird. ("Right up there are crossbills, shrikes, Canyon Wren, vireos, pelagic species, and Merlin," he adds.) He also thinks Odell's 90 Shilling Ale "should be the official state microbrew."

"And if I could just find a cabin and bottle of whiskey," Leatherman adds, he plans to write a book about his more than 2,000 birds-and-bugs visits to Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins, his home patch. Working title: *Life Among the Headstones*.

Continued on page 10

Emma Riley and Northern Harrier

To sign up for this free Nov. 28 Zoom presentation, click this registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_D0y4fU4sSwKXFvpWuCMkNg

You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Riley's program as the date approaches.

Hawk Watch 2022: Looking Back, and Forward

Emma Riley
Monday, November 28
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

Emma Riley was the full-time hawk counter and daily on-site coordinator during the two-month-plus spring 2022 season of DFO's Hawk Watch program. She will speak about national Hawk Watch efforts — where they are and why they matter — and present an update on the results and trends for this year's Hawk Watch on Dinosaur Ridge.

Riley is a raptor biologist and naturalist with a degree in wildlife biology from Colorado State University. Since graduating, she has worked with Ferruginous Hawks in WY, breeding passerines across WY and ID, and more recently at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, MN during fall migration.

Raptor biology is her passion, especially migration and movement ecology. One of her "spark birds" is Ferruginous Hawk, and Dinosaur Ridge is considered the best place in America to see migrating "Ferruges" in spring.

When not birding, Riley enjoys snowboarding, mountain biking, and hanging out with her dog and two cats in Fort Collins, either at home or at a local brewery.

Common Nighthawk
Jim Esten

About that column: Cats + birds feedback

FROM THE PRESIDENT

They're cute, cuddly . . . and predatory

*Editor's note: In September, DFO member **Audrey Boag** wrote to club president **Susan Blansett** about her column on cats and birds in last month's issue of* The Lark Bunting *(From The President, "*They're cute, cuddly . . . and predatory*," page 4, Vol. 58, Issue 10). We are publishing Audrey's letter and Susan's response below to continue the conversation. Both letters have been edited slightly for clarity and conciseness.*

Sept. 10, 2022

Dear Susan,

I am a member of Denver Field Ornithologists and a passionate advocate for birds. I give presentations aimed at raising public awareness of ground and cavity nesters, and on recognizing the significance of sounds and behaviors. I did an in-depth Ovenbird study for Jefferson County Open Space, and I am in the midst of another that will help protect raptor habitat.

I also spent 17 brutal years (1989 – 2006) working with multiple organizations to reduce the number of free-roaming cats. During this time we handled over 11,000 cats, so I am sickened every time I see articles like this one. DFO and the American Bird Conservancy have no practical experience in this area. I do, and I ask that you read and carefully consider the attached documents before adopting cat-related policies.

I need to preface what follows by saying that for every story you tell me about mutilated birds, I will tell you one about mutilated cats. We want the same thing.

Know at a minimum that vilifying cats as ruthless predators *facilitates* abandonment by perpetuating the myth that cats can survive on their own. *Abandonment is the origin of feral colonies*.

You say, "There's no question that, in a community of birders that includes cat lovers, DFO will side with the birds." This is an utterly false choice and a ridiculous conclusion. If you want fewer free-roaming cats, volunteer at The Feline Fix to answer calls for help during the soul-crushing month of August. *[Ed.: Numbers of free-roaming cats peak in summer "kitten season," as do shelter surrenders of pets as households take vacations and make moves.]* Spend a week going door-to-door in ZIP code 80219 (which we identified as having the highest number of feral cat colonies in the metro area) to see if you can get one person who lets a cat go outside to not do so because it might kill birds. Become an animal control officer so you can see how effective laws are not. The best way to keep birds safe from cats is to help cats. This should be your narrative.

For example, we collaborated with multiple agencies to provide ongoing, mobile, low-cost sterilization on-site in ZIP code 80219 for both owned and feral cats. It was more difficult than sitting in front of a computer writing position statements, but it resulted in a marked reduction in the number of unowned and feral cats in that area as measured by shelter intakes and a reduction in calls for help.

This "issue" is a waste of your goodwill. It undermines the organizations whose *mission* it is to reduce the number of free-roaming cats effectively, humanely, and skillfully. If you want to protect birds, make a generous donation to a local rescue group, low-cost spay/neuter clinic, or shelter. Then redirect your attention to the statewide elimination of rodenticides, insecticides, and lead ammunition, as well as to shouting out "lights out," fostering local land stewardship, and cultivating the wonder of birds.

Kind regards . . . I look forward to your response!

Audrey Boag

Continued on page 12

Sept. 13, 2022

Dear Audrey,
Thank you for your email, I'm so pleased to know that there is someone among our members who is so passionate and knowledgeable about feral cats, and about birds! I'm copying **Steve Ryder**, our Conservation Chair, on this reply, and the information you have shared will be very helpful to us in developing a strategy for action around this issue.

The intent of my column was not to disrespect or undervalue the cats as beings, but rather to raise awareness among humans about the impacts of cats on wildlife, specifically birds. DFO is, after all, a group in which the topic of birds most resonates. It was also my intent to convey that it is human behavior that resulted in this problem, and only humans can turn it around. Humans domesticated cats and transported them to every corner of the world, as we have done with other species that negatively affect birds. But none has been as detrimental as cats.

I will read all of your attachments this week. And I would like to meet you in person. Thank you for taking the time to read my column and for your continued passion for the safety of animals and wildlife. I'm sure our Conservation Committee would be happy to have your expertise in creating some educational materials for responsible feline management and ownership, and in communicating the importance of this issue beyond our DFO community to a broader audience. Let's carry on the conversation, please.

Susan Blansett

Welcome to new DFO members

Barb Archer of Denver; Theresa Braymer and George Newman, Arvada; Jeanne Dillon, Denver; Stephen Dreskin and June Inuzuka, Denver; Alison and August Hazel, Golden; Ellen and David James, Westminster; Bill Prather, Longmont; Fran Rulon-Miller, Salida; Denise Rustning, Littleton; John Salisbury, Broomfield; Louise Schottstaedt, Castle Pines; Mark and Dona Wallace, Golden

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Doris Cruze, Stephen Dreskin and June Inuzuka, August and Alison Hazel, and Patrick O'Driscoll

Friends of DFO
Stephen Dreskin and June Inuzuka, August and Alison Hazel, and Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch
Stephen Dreskin and June Inuzuka, and August and Alison Hazel

Gray Catbird
David Prentice

Ajit and Liza Antony
Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:
Up close with the Antonys: 50 years' travel from Bombay to New York to DFO

Editor's note: IN THE SCOPE is a series of Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips and others who volunteer and participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email The Lark Bunting *at* patodrisk@gmail.com

Names:	**Ajit and Liza Antony**
Home city:	**Denver (Central Park neighborhood)**
Occupations:	**Retired urologist and "student of human nature" (Ajit) and retired pathologist (Liza)**

How/when we got into birding?

We were married in Bombay, India (now Mumbai), where growing up, each of us was aware of birds but didn't really have any interest in them.

Ajit: *I was a Boy Scout and we tried to collect the most badges. Another guy I was competing against had earned a birdwatcher's badge. I also remember parrots in the garden, birds that we now know were Rose-ringed Parakeets.*

Liza: *I remember the kites. When eating lunch outside in the yard, everyone would say, "Watch out for the kite! Make sure it doesn't come and snatch your food." We went on hikes in India, but I was unaware of birding and looking at birds.*

We both went to medical school in India and interned there. After applying to 150 hospitals all over the US for a residency, Ajit was accepted in New York City in 1972 and Liza followed in 1973. In 1977, we moved to a small Hudson River Valley town an hour away. Outside our apartment, we began to notice some pretty birds. A year later, when Liza prepared for the pathology board exam, all the candidates were asked to buy good quality pairs of . . . binoculars? Yes, the examiners projected pathology slides on a screen in the examination hall, and Liza and the others needed binoculars to ID tumors and organisms on the slides from their seats.

Ajit: *The Russian playwright* ***Anton Chekhov*** *wrote that if a writer introduces a pistol into the plot, it must have a purpose in the narrative (a principle known today as* Chekov's Gun*). Similarly, we used Liza's new Nikon binoculars to look at those birds outside the apartment. Once we bought a Peterson field guide, we knew we were looking at an Indigo Bunting and a Downy Woodpecker. Each evening, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak would land in a tree by our deck and sing away.*

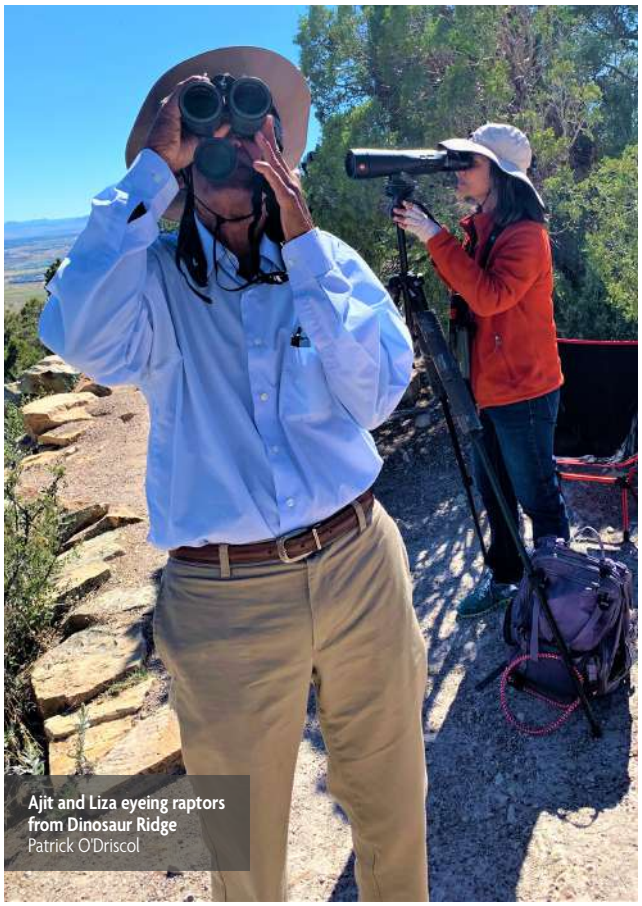
Liza: *At first, learning the birds was like an unknown in pathology, where you don't know what the diagnosis is. On my daily walk to my residency at New York University, there was this stunningly plumaged bird, but I didn't know then what it was. It turned out to be a starling!*

A few years later and living in Cornwall-On-Hudson, NY, we enjoyed taking our young son and daughter on naturalist-led bird and nature walks at the local nature museum.

Liza: *It was kid-friendly, and our children were just ages 2 and 5. The naturalist showed us the nests of birds and things like that. It was very casual.*

Ajit: *We also began helping with a local "hawk watch," which we found out about after joining the Orange County (NY) Audubon Society for their weekend walks. Eventually we joined the local Mearns Bird Club, too.*

Continued on page 14



Ajit and Liza eyeing raptors from Dinosaur Ridge
Patrick O'Driscol

IN THE SCOPE *cont from page 13*

When / why we joined DFO?

We first birded in Colorado in 2009, when we came to meet the Denver family of our son **Anil**'s fiancée. In 2016, when our daughter **Sheila** was finishing her residency at Yale New Haven Hospital, she and her husband **Steve** (also a physician) had their first child. We knew how difficult it was to bring up our own children and practice medicine at the same time. So, having just retired, we stayed with them in New Haven and returned home on weekends for bird trips. After Sheila accepted a position in Denver later that year, we offered to continue helping out here. So of course we joined DFO, going on field trips and meeting a lot of nice birders during our eight-month stay.

When Sheila and Steve had their second child, we came back to Denver again for six months in 2018-19. Then last year, Anil, his wife and their three children moved here from Los Angeles to be close to his sister and her family.

Ajit: *With both children and five grandchildren in Denver, what choice did we have but to move here after 50 years in New York State?!*

Liza: *The balance of power became Denver rather than New York. We arrived here permanently two months ago.*

Our birding philosophies?

Ajit: *Mine is the same as it had been in my medical practice: "Be the best I can be." Just as I kept up with the literature in urology, I keep up with the latest birding literature. I wrote articles and created online species spreadsheets for the bird club back in New York. I like sharing what I have learned, as experienced birders did when I was starting out. In birding as in medicine, you put clues together and come up with an ID, a diagnosis.*

Liza: *As an intermediate birder, I enjoy the company of all the friendly people in DFO — carpooling together and seeing new birds. And I'm interested in conservation. We also support the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and other earth-centered organizations. The challenging aspect of birding is also exciting. When we went on a DFO field trip to southeastern Colorado, the birds that stayed in my mind were the ones where we could only see little bits of the bird. Is it a warbler? Could it be this, could it be that?*

How did you become interested in watching hawks?

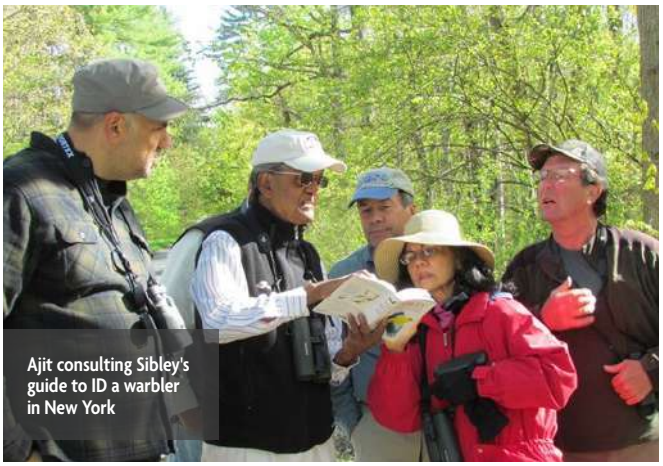
When we started birdwatching in New York, Ajit became a hawk watcher at the Mount Peter HawkCount, the oldest all-volunteer count in the country. We got involved in other counts in the Hudson River Valley, a major corridor for birds of prey. The Hook Mountain Hawk Watch in NY, conducted in autumn for 50 years, had never done a spring season watch. Ajit was curious about its potential for spring migration, so we went up in 2021 and 2022 on days he thought might be good because of wind direction. We ended up recording the highest spring flight of Broad-winged Hawks (2,482) on the eastern or Atlantic Flyway.

We are doing something similar this fall. We go to the Hawk Watch location on Dinosaur Ridge where DFO conducts the formal spring count. Ajit believes there is no reason that a fall count here can't reasonably be as good as in spring. We may be wrong, but we'll find out by season's end. Either way, the information is useful.

Continued on page 15

Memory of our first DFO field trip?

Liza: *One of our first was a "chase trip" on the eastern Plains, something we had never done before. At the meeting spot, leader **Chris Rurik** described the birds we hoped to see, including Northern Cardinal and Carolina Wren.*
Ajit: *I pretended to yawn and said, "Oh, these are garden birds for us in New York." But knowing the call note of the wren, I was able to point people in its direction. I also was able to spot another rarity, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and show it to the others through my scope.*



Ajit consulting Sibley's guide to ID a warbler in New York

A favorite birding memory?

Liza: *One was seeing a Lewis's Woodpecker. Such colors in a woodpecker! We were driving along south of Denver and found nine of them. Another was seeing a Three-toed Woodpecker. The effort it took to find that bird! We walked through shrubs and along trails without success. Back at the car, I could hear a woodpecker tapping. And there it was, close to the road! We probably walked right past it. Finally, on the drive home, we passed three Great Horned Owls atop telephone poles. You would never see that in New York.*
Ajit: *Lapland Longspur is an unusual bird to find in New York in winter. So when someone posted a video three years ago on COBirds of about 500,000 Laplands in a snowstorm east of Denver, we had to go see. Out the next day, we only saw a few. After the next storm, same result. The third time we drove east into an ice storm. Around Seibert, halfway from Limon to Kansas, we passed five big trucks that had slid off I-70. Fortunately, we skidded only once, mildly. And we eventually found a flying cloud of at least 12,000 Lapland Longspurs! The drive was scary but the result very gratifying.*

Our favorite DFO trip destinations?

Liza: *That's a really tough question. There are so many good ones, but I think Chico Basin Ranch. So many birds! The most recent time that we knew a Chico Basin field trip was coming up, we set an alarm to make sure we got on the list when registration opened.*
Ajit: *People ask, "What's your favorite book?" and a good answer is "The one I'm reading now." So too, the next field trip is my favorite.*

Favorite place to bird in Colorado?

Liza: *I enjoyed our last time at Red Rocks Park. The scenery was spectacular and the birds were good. We saw a Lazuli Bunting. But probably my favorite is the Pawnee National Grasslands. They are the most special. Every time we came to Colorado to visit before — 2009, 2010 and 2016, and 2018 — we went out to Pawnee.*
Ajit: *I think Allenspark, CO, when there were feeders at the old Fawn Brook Inn that attracted rosy-finches in winter. Going there was very exciting because we didn't have any rosy-finches in New York state.*

Someplace we'd like to go birding where we never have?

Ajit: *I don't seek to travel all over the world for new species, but I go with Liza when she plans a trip and I do enjoy it. I would rather know what's in my "extended home patch." In New York State, that meant three routes for the Hawk Migration Association of North America's Winter Raptor Survey. This winter, after our fall watch is over, we plan to do at least two local surveys — south of Barr Lake and around Red Rocks. Or, we might do the area around Ault, where we know raptors overwinter.*
Liza: *I had signed us up for a trip in 2020 to Machu Pichu in Peru until COVID-19 canceled that. It wasn't a birding trip but we would have birded there anyway. That will remain on my wish list.*

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM REVIEW

Birding's future, from BB's and GX's to Z's and A's: Is it time for elders to let go?

Ted Floyd during his Zoom talk

Alejo Williams Viveros, checklisting at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
Ted Floyd

Marc Strong

Ahead of DFO's evening program on Sept. 26, Boulder County birder, author and avian journalist **Ted Floyd** promised an outside-the-box conversation about today's generational spread of birding attitudes and philosophies. He certainly delivered to his audience of about 90 viewers on Zoom.

Floyd, a frequent DFO monthly program presenter over the years and a big fan of our club, labeled his talk "Letting Go: Birding and Nature Study in the Age of Zoomers and Alphas." Aimed at our pastime's predominant Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, his presentation meant to provoke thought, some of it unsettling, about the future of birding. Roughly summarized, he suggested that the birding culture's prevailing norms probably won't work for Generations Z and Alpha (aka Zoomers and their youngest siblings, the Alphas). In short, Floyd said it's probably time for older generations to begin handing over the keys to give the youngers a greater say, now and in their future.

Noting that interest in birding has been rising for years, he said the trend can't continue: "We're at an inflection point. Something's going to bend, something's going to break, something's going to twist, something's going to reform." Floyd, the longtime editor of *Birding*, monthly magazine of the American Birding Association, sees this impending change as exciting. And walking his talk, Floyd himself regularly engages younger and newer birders and learns from them, from his own teenage daughter **Hannah** to 9-year-old **Alejo Williams Viveros**, who birds circles around grownups six decades older.

Pointing out ways "we can consciously decide as a community where birding and nature study is going," Floyd said his new approach is "intended to be provocative but in a good-natured and even charming sort of way."

He offered an exercise in perspective to start. On the screen he projected a photo of a Great Horned Owl, then pulled back with a second image of someone in the foreground taking that picture. "The moment we humans engage an owl is the moment we inject ourselves into the owl's experience," Floyd said, suggesting that using an owl as an "emblem of the wilderness" outside the human world is untrue. "Have you ever baited a bird? Used a flash? Played a recording? Gotten a little too close to a bird?" He said everyone has done one of those or similar at some point. "We interfere with nature all the time." Sage advice for future generations of birders.

Continued on page 17

PROGRAM REVIEW *cont from page 16*

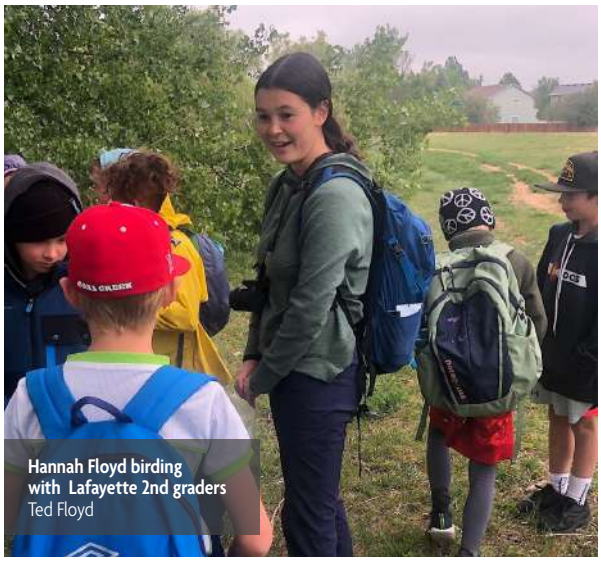
A Huge public turnout for afternoon bird event in Boulder
Ted Floyd

Floyd said passing the torch to younger generations means changing some supposedly fundamental ways of birding. For example, early start times for birding, long gospel among serious birders but pretty much no one else. He demonstrated, with powerful evidence, that shifting from early morning to 1 p.m. as the start time for a public gull-viewing program in winter at the Valmont Power Plant in Boulder "altered the nature of the activity" from off-putting to welcoming. Within two years, the annual event exploded from 18 participants to more than 500. He said the old mantra of "It's not real birding unless it hurts" may be a barrier to engaging new people in our pastime.

Another Floyd example: A first-Sunday monthly outing to Waneka Lake in Lafayette, meant to engage people who wouldn't normally go nature watching, is advertised proudly as open to dogs, cellphones, and (gasp!) children. Different from traditional birding? Absolutely. Still wonderful? You bet.

How about another supposed no-no: Leaving hummingbird feeders out past the time that the birds normally have migrated south. Floyd said several species of hummers "have drastically shifted their wintering ranges in the southeastern United States, and that's due in large part to the fact that every single home in the South has hummingbird feeders. After NASCAR, it's the most popular thing to do in the South." He thinks the educational value of feeding hummingbirds outweighs any potentially negative aspects of keeping food out past their usual departure date.

Continued on page 18



Hannah Floyd birding with Lafayette 2nd graders
Ted Floyd

View the complete video of "Letting Go: Birding and Nature Study In the Age of Zoomers and Alphas" with Ted Floyd in the Past Programs archive on the Denver Field Ornithologists website: https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx

PROGRAM REVIEW *cont from page 17*

Floyd, himself a pretty fair bird photographer, talked at some length about various aspects of birders' handiest tool after binoculars and scopes. He noted that some birder-photographers, mostly younger, now dispense with traditional gear altogether and only watch birds through their digital camera lenses. Instantly re-viewable photos can help people see things they don't see at first glance in the field. He noted that the showing up in Colorado of less-common Bushtits with "black ears" (dark cheek patches) would've been missed without birders studying their digital photos.

As for apps that help birders in the field, Floyd generally welcomes them. "There are a lot of Merlin haters out there," he said of the popular (and free) photo/sound ID aid from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "It's cheap. It's 'cheating.' It's 'corrupted.' " But how, he wondered aloud, is asking for help wrong? Mentorship is a privilege not available to everyone and apps like Merlin are an instant alternative. Yes, he admitted, Merlin can make "boneheaded" mistakes on bird ID, but machine learning software gets better and better over time. Like the rise of computer chess programs that grandmasters can no longer beat, Floyd said that eventually, "Merlin's going to be better than the best of us."

One more politically charged topic: Bird names. What and how we label species can be a barrier to engaging new birders. The overuse of four-letter "Alpha code" abbreviations by some veterans can confuse or turn off novices. as can clinging to species names originally given to honor problematic people. Floyd suggests more descriptive renaming, like substituting "Chanting Foothills Warbler" for MacGillivray's Warbler, which would "perfectly emblematize what this bird is about."

To wrap things up, Floyd shared part of a nearly century-old essay about the possible directions birding could have taken — from conservation to life history to taxidermy and a thousand others — instead of where it went: Species identification, in all its minutiae.

"Who says birdwatching has to be about identification?" he asked, suggesting instead that it's time to "let go and let someone else perhaps determine where birding is going to go."

Getting there might finally address chronic lack of diversity in "official" ornithology, still largely white and male. To illustrate, Floyd flashed images on the screen of long contributor lists from two bird field guides, one published 40 years ago and the other just recently. Neither named even one woman, yet more than half of birders today are female, he said. New projects are underway to correct such glaring imbalance, but "we can't rest on our laurels."

Floyd added that he had hoped for his presentation to bring a night of "uncomfortable outside-the-box feelings" to DFO. He certainly accomplished that. Shaping the future of birding by letting go for the next generations to guide us is clearly coming. The only question is when.

Marc Strong, who joined DFO in 2021, is a lab tech by day and grad student in science writing by night. His grandmother taught him to love watching birds, and now, he endeavors to write about them.

FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

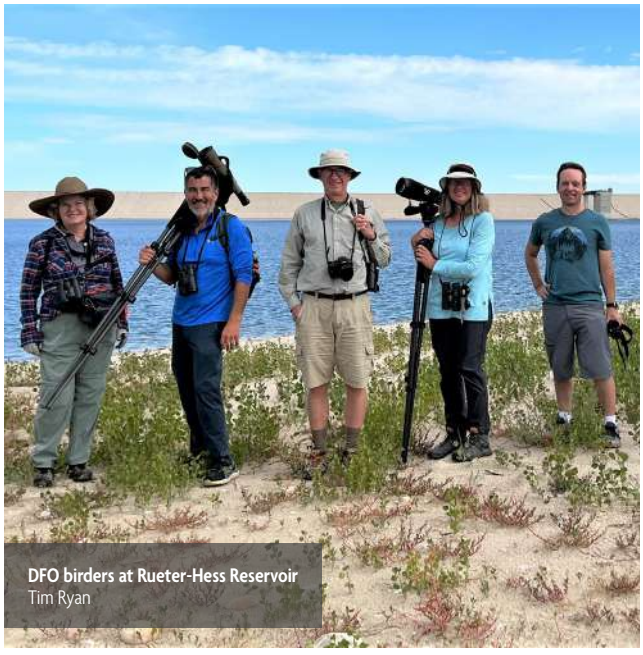
Band of birders: Helping those who lead us into the field

David Suddjian

On every bird club field trip, the mix of people will vary, levels of birding expertise may lean one way or another, and each trip leader may have different gifts for leading.

But every good field trip has a classic feel and flow that includes two vital qualities: An initial sense of excitement and mounting anticipation for what may be out there to see, and the just plain joy of being together with other birders who have the same enthusiasm. To me, every participant is a friend, whether old or new — and in my experience, DFO field trippers are great people to get to know. All of which means that if things go well, a DFO field trip is a great shared experience.

As a DFO field outing progresses, our eyes open wider and we grow closer to the world around us, the magic of birds and birding. If we're fortunate, we'll encounter a nice variety of species, and most of us will get to see some of them for the first time. Among regular and longtime birding friends, such things unfold naturally. On a club field trip, however, a different dynamic is in play. It's a group exercise among a collective band of birders, directed by their leader.



DFO birders at Rueter-Hess Reservoir
Tim Ryan

DFO field trip leaders are facilitators for what our club seeks to achieve: Consistently high quality and enjoyable bird outings for all. It's no exaggeration to say that DFO leaders are ambassadors for our club and its mission. And so, like ambassadors, we expect trip leaders to be welcoming, inclusive, enthusiastic, helpful, diplomatic, responsible, prepared and patient.

Not only do trip leaders help participants find, observe, enjoy and learn about birds — they help them become better birders. And when they promote birding ethics and conservation ideals, it helps make birding more important.

Indeed, DFO *certifies* its field trip leaders to standards cultivated over the 87-year history of our club. Certification says to trip participants that our trip leaders will lead a quality field outing. It also says they will follow DFO best practices for consistently good, safe, fun and welcoming trips. That means attention to ideals of safety, ethics, birding quality, planning and communication — specific steps taken before, during and after every trip.

On Nov. 12, our field trip leaders will gather at Barr Lake SP for the fall leader forum. This year's focus will be on standards and best practices. We'll gather to discuss and learn from each other, sharing field experiences and ideas for becoming even better ambassadors for DFO.

To help us better understand your perspectives as field trip participants, we invite you to answer a short online survey that the DFO Field Trip Committee will send out later in October. We seek your thoughts on best practices, so please watch for our brief survey in your email. Your response will help us work together to make DFO's unparalleled field trip program even stronger.

David Suddjian, Field Trip chair since August 2021, came to Colorado in 2013 from his native California. Since 2016, he has led well over 200 DFO outings, and he organized the club's 2018 "Big Year" (362 species on DFO trips).

FIELD GALLERY

What they were looking at

Pelican Point, Bear Creek Lake Park, Jefferson Co.

When: Sept. 11, 2022

Who: Leader **David Suddjian** + 8 participants

Result: 44 species (eBird checklist: https://ebird.org/checklist/S118519241)

EDITOR'S NOTE: This begins a new occasional feature in The Lark Bunting. *"**What they were looking at**" will include a photo of birders on a DFO field trip, and one or more images of what was in their scopes.*

*Contribute YOUR photos of your DFO trip group and the birds YOU were looking at. Email submissions or contact editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** with questions at patodrisk@gmail.com. Thanks!*

Photo: **DFO field trippers at Bear Creek Lake Park, Sept. 11, 2022** (Jason Bidgood)

The bird: Solitary Sandpiper

Until next month, good birding, DFO'ers!

Solitary Sandpiper
Bear Creek Lake Park
Anne Craig

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	$	_____
Hawk Watch donation (DFO community science)	$	_____
Total	$	_____

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THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 58 | ISSUE 12 | DECEMBER 2022 DFOBIRDS.ORG

HAWKTOBER!

Photo gallery: *Thisclose* to stunning birds of prey

PAGE 18

FIELD TRIPPING

Standing up for (and loving) Joey's annual Big Sit!

PAGE 23

LAURA STEADMAN "IN THE SCOPE"

Sparked into birding by an infamous oil spill

PAGE 12

"LAST LOOK" ESSAY/GALLERY

Gifts of an early-rise outing: More than just the birds

PAGE 29

PHOTO OF THE MONTH »

Wild Turkey

Jim Esten

Wet Mountain Valley
Custer County

ON THE COVER

A DFO member since 2014, **Jim Esten** took photos on and off for 35 years before getting his first digital camera in 2001. He didn't focus on birds until 10 years ago while visiting his sister in Florida. Retired from network IT service, Esten is photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*.

Wild Turkey: Giving thanks for a North American original

Embedded as it is in our national holiday of symbolic Pilgrim roots and harvest blessings, it's easy to forget that we almost sent the Wild Turkey the way of the Passenger Pigeon, the Dodo, and (probably) the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

Habitat loss to clearing of forests and unregulated hunting from the mid-1800s on nearly did in this most American of species. Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) is native only to the North American continent. By the late 1930s, turkey numbers nationwide were estimated at fewer than 30,000 birds. By the 1940s, they were gone from Canada and a number of states in their previous range.

The species' national restoration and recovery is considered a noteworthy wildlife management success. Wild Turkeys now strut across the countryside in every state but Alaska (yes, even Hawai'i). Those troupes of goose-sized, wattle-wagging grazers we love to see on bird outings on the Eastern Plains, in the Front Range foothills and mountain valleys are the result in part of aggressive reintroduction of the species in the 1980s by Colorado Parks & Wildlife and its partners. Two of the six subspecies of Wild Turkey are found in the state: the native Merriam's, and the Rio Grande, which was introduced in riparian corridors on the Plains.

Jim Esten, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*, took this month's cover photo of a couple of Wild Turkeys in southern Colorado's Wet Mountain Valley. Like many locales in the state, it has some of the wooded grasslands and forests with open-canopied clearings that the species favors as it forages for acorns, berries, nuts, seeds, insects and the occasional amphibian, lizard or small snake.

The ancestral Puebloan peoples who once inhabited the mysterious settlements of the Four Corners and Southwest domesticated Wild Turkeys for food, clothing (turkey feather robes), tool and ritual use in their ancient pueblos. But they probably were not the first. The turkeys on most family dinner tables this Thanksgiving descend from a central Mexican subspecies of Wild Turkey that ancient Mesoamericans domesticated at least 2,000 years ago. (The Aztecs, by the way, associated the bird with their trickster god, Tezcatlipoca.)

What's more, Spanish explorers of the New World took turkeys back to Europe, where their use and consumption spread. In a geographical irony, a ship from England to the New World brought domesticated turkeys back to America at Jamestown, VA in 1608. (Presumably any turkey consumed at the "first Thanksgiving" in 1621 would have been the local wild fowl.)

Fun fact: Although Wild Turkeys have excellent eyesight in daytime, they can't see a thing after dark, which is why they roost overnight well up into trees.

Another fun fact: If you're into bird group names (murder of crows, bevvy of quail, etc.), you call a flock of this species a *rafter* of turkeys.

Here's wishing you a rafter (of the domestic kind) this Thanksgiving from all of us at *The Lark Bunting*!

— Patrick O'Driscoll

Patrick O'Driscoll, a DFO member since 2014, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads field trips (his patch is Denver City Park) and has been editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020.

FOR SALE

SWAROVSKI 8X32 ELs

New price! Swarovski 8x32 EL binoculars, $1,250. Four years old, excellent condition, purchased new for $2,050. Evaluated in July by Swarovski rep as "excellent." I bought this model for its light weight (21 ounces). A new eye condition requires me to upgrade to binoculars that admit even more light. I am told the EL is particularly prized; the model has been discontinued and is only available on the used market. Includes suspender harness, unused neck strap, case, extra eyecup, manual, original box, and transferable warranty. Contact **Colleen Nunn** at 303-520-7496.

DFO AdBIRDtisements!

DFO AdBIRDtisements are FREE ads in *The Lark Bunting* to seek or sell birding-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (works of art, photographs, note cards, posters, etc.). This includes materials donated for free.

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include a weblink if items offered online
- *The Lark Bunting* reserves the right to edit for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit). ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Ads available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: **last day of month** except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

To place a DFO AdBIRDtisement, email editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Next deadline: **Wednesday, Nov. 30.**

The Lark Bunting newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists is published monthly except for joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submit original articles to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. Editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any such materials.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Can we talk climate? Changing how we do so may help us . . . and the birds

Susan Blansett

As you read this, it's November, the month for Thanksgiving — and for important elections here and across the land. Unless the races and ballot issues were too close to call, you should now know the results of Colorado's midterm vote. How your own candidates and issues fared may well affect how thankful you are this holiday.

With giving thanks in mind, I want to share some follow-up thoughts about topics in a couple of my most recent columns in this space.

It is a scientific truism — so obvious it's hardly worth noting — that in the same way humans are responsible for bird population declines because of our free-roaming domestic and feral cats, we are also responsible for planetary climate change that is altering ecosystems and biodiversity. Thanks to prevailing science, both assertions have wide support, though millions (billions?) of people may be unaware of the facts or, for some, simply in denial. Nevertheless, prevailing wisdom marks the year 2050 as a critical global "tipping point" to turn things around or, at least, to drastically slow our slide toward climate-induced Armageddon.

As a species, we humans are clever and powerful. We are capable of changing our environment! But we're not always ready to consider or acknowledge the negative effects of our actions. We certainly have the technological know-how to fix this (even if not in time to save every threatened species). We also have the moral imperative. But are we committed to following it?

Unlike us, birds and other animals live always in the moment, paw to mouth, claw to beak. They haven't the time to dwell on the past or worry about the future. Instinctively, survival depends only on how they respond here and now. Nature has equipped them with various adaptations to gradually changing conditions, though methods and means differ from species to species. But the current pace of human-caused changes to habitat and climate is too fast for evolutionary adaptation to keep up. That puts many species on the brink of extinction, and others not so far behind.

As birders, we witness some of this. Year to year, we observe and note changes in familiar habitats and places where we bird. Thanks to eBird, we chart changes in the numbers and varieties of species simply by including what we see (and noting what we don't) in our checklists from one year to the next.

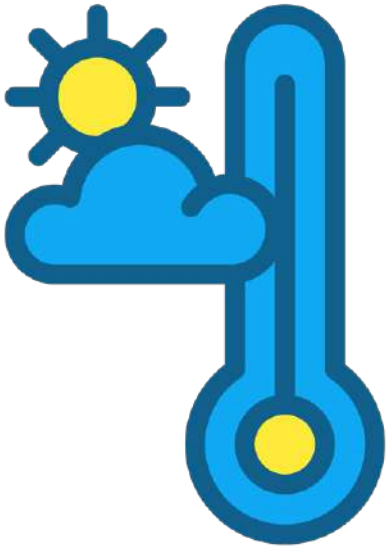
A 2021 survey published in the journal *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* reported that bird species are "altering their physiology — growing bigger beaks or longer legs in response to climate change." Some parrot species are growing larger bills as temperatures rise. Some migrating songbirds are growing smaller — shrinking in size. Similar phenomena have been documented in mammals. "Shapeshifting does not mean that animals are coping with climate change and that all is 'fine,'" says **Sara Ryding**, the study's author. "It just means they are evolving to survive it — but we're not sure what the other ecological consequences of these changes are, or indeed that all species are capable of changing and surviving."

My point: The other species we follow are *literally* doing everything within their power to survive. Some already are shifting breeding grounds and migration routes, even altering their physiology. By our individual actions, we will assist or impede their success.

And though we may do worthwhile things to help — vote for candidates who support climate action, donate to climate causes, limit water use, drive electric cars, plant gardens to sustain birds and bees — how we *talk* about climate change may tip the scale between success and failure. How we talk affects social change.

I say this while acknowledging that this topic is not my strong suit. So in my search a while back for guidance, I found

Continued on page 5



The #Talking Climate Handbook – How to Have Conversations About Climate In Your Daily Life. I can't recommend it enough. Thanks to Climate Outreach, a UK-based nonprofit for direct individual action, it's a free download at https://climateoutreach.org/reports/how-to-have-a-climate-change-conversation-talking-climate/. I'm practicing one set of Climate Outreach tips to improve my conversations with others about climate. In a clever arrangement, the main points' starting letters spell it out:

Respect your conversational partner and find common ground
Enjoy it!
Ask questions
Listen, and show you're heard
Tell your story
Action makes it easier (but doesn't fix it)
Learn from your conversational partner
Keep going and keep connected

I'm learning that even *how* I think about a topic can affect how willing and able I am to converse with people who don't share my point of view. If like me you need a handy mnemonic when facing a difficult conversation, download that handbook!

All right. Enough talk of talking for now. The winter birds are arriving and settling in. Thanksgiving is around the corner. Go embrace both!

— Susan

Susan Blansett, club president since 2021, has volunteered in numerous committee roles and as an officer since joining the DFO Board in 2016. She became a field trip leader this year. Susan works for the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

Welcome to new DFO members

James, Andrew and Renu Carroll of Colorado Springs; Steve and Deana Chupp, Denver; Thomas Forre, Lakewood; Michelle Husko, Lakewood; Pom Korkiat, Denver; David Laliberte, Colorado Springs; Pam Lauman, Fruita; Jane Lee, Denver; Jana Mathieson, Denver; Donna and Roger Mattson, Golden; Megan Jones Patterson, Boulder; Deb Piranian, Boulder; Carol Rolland, Wheat Ridge; Mark Rosenstein, Boulder; Melody Serra, Highlands Ranch; Debra Strike, Colorado Springs, and Lois Wiersma, Lone Tree

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Dan and Carol Cook, Michelle Husko, and Melody Serra

Friends of DFO
Dan and Carol Cook, Denise and Danny Smith, and Mary Ann Tavery

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch
Dan and Carol Cook, Jim Esten, Denise and Danny Smith, and Mary Ann Tavery

DFO? It's me.

. . . ON SCIENCE AND LEARNING

Birds were always part of my life growing up, but I had no idea then that I'd study them for a living now. As a raptor biologist, I live my passion every day. And when I began work with DFO as a Hawk Watch counter last spring, I got to share it with others. Helping to lead and educate members and volunteers on Dinosaur Ridge means as much to me as the scientific impact of our work together. Science, sharing, learning: What a perfect mix!

EMMA RILEY
Member since 2021

DFO: It's ALL of us

To renew your membership or to join Denver Field Ornithologists for 2023 (includes the rest of 2022 free), and also to make tax-free, year-end contributions, visit https://dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx

dfo
DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

DFO NEWS

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? ***DFO News Notes*** *is where to share them: club news, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life (and life bird!) events, and any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany. Send your items, photos and any questions to* ***Patrick O'Driscoll*** *at patodrisk@gmail.com.*

WANTED: MEMBERSHIP CHAIR FOR DFO

Denver Field Ornithologists operates entirely on the generosity and strength of member volunteers. Who out there is ready to join our team in the key position of DFO Membership Committee chair? This is a great opportunity to get to know more of our more than 660 members and contribute your communication and organizational skills to the cause. The Membership chair leads our effort to recruit and retain members, maintains DFO's membership database and promotes club membership at various bird-related functions.

We seek someone comfortable engaging others, and able to communicate by email and navigate the DFO website in helping members view and manage their status online. This volunteer role asks a time commitment of up to 150 hours a year (about 12 hours a month, give or take). That estimate includes attendance at quarterly board meetings. At present, the committee includes two other members who advise and assist the chair.

Interested? Contact Membership chair **Mary Geder** at mfg5000@live.com or 303-981-8823.

CFO SETS 2023 CONVENTION IN COLORADO HIGH COUNTRY

Colorado Field Ornithologists is heading into the mountains for its 2023 convention. The shift to higher ground also means a shift to summer for field trips focused on high-country birds in breeding season. The convention is scheduled from **Wednesday, July 18** through **Monday, July 24** at **Copper Mountain Convention Center** in **Summit County**.

CFO says this year's convention is a joint partnership with Western Field Ornithologists and features field trips throughout the high country, workshops and science sessions, a welcome picnic and Saturday night banquet, young birder events, exhibit hall and an expanded silent auction. For those with family or friends along, the resort has a roster of non-convention activities and amenities. Save the dates and look for more convention details to be announced later this fall.

STATE OF THE BIRDS 2022: WATERFOWL UP, MOST OF THE REST NOT

Just released in October, the 2022 US State of the Birds Report is the first deep dive into the health of America's avian wildlife since the alarming 2019 study that charted the loss of nearly 3 billion birds in the US and Canada in the past half-century. Although the new report suggests strong rebound among waterfowl where robust wetland conservation efforts have improved habitat, overall decline everywhere else is the dire headline, from deserts and oceans to grasslands and forests. The study, published by a consortium of 30-plus private and public conservation and science organizations and agencies, finds more than half of US species in decline, with the steepest slide among grassland birds (about 35 percent loss since 1970).

It also spotlights 70 newly identified "Tipping Point" birds that have lost a combined two-thirds of their populations in the past 50 years. They include species familiar and beloved: Greater Sage-Grouse, Black and Brown-capped Rosy Finches, Rufous Hummingbird, Pinyon Jay, Harris's Sparrow, Pectoral and Stilt Sandpipers, Mountain Plover, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Chimney Swift, to name a few. Without change, the Tipping Point 70 are forecast to lose another half of their populations in the next 50 years.

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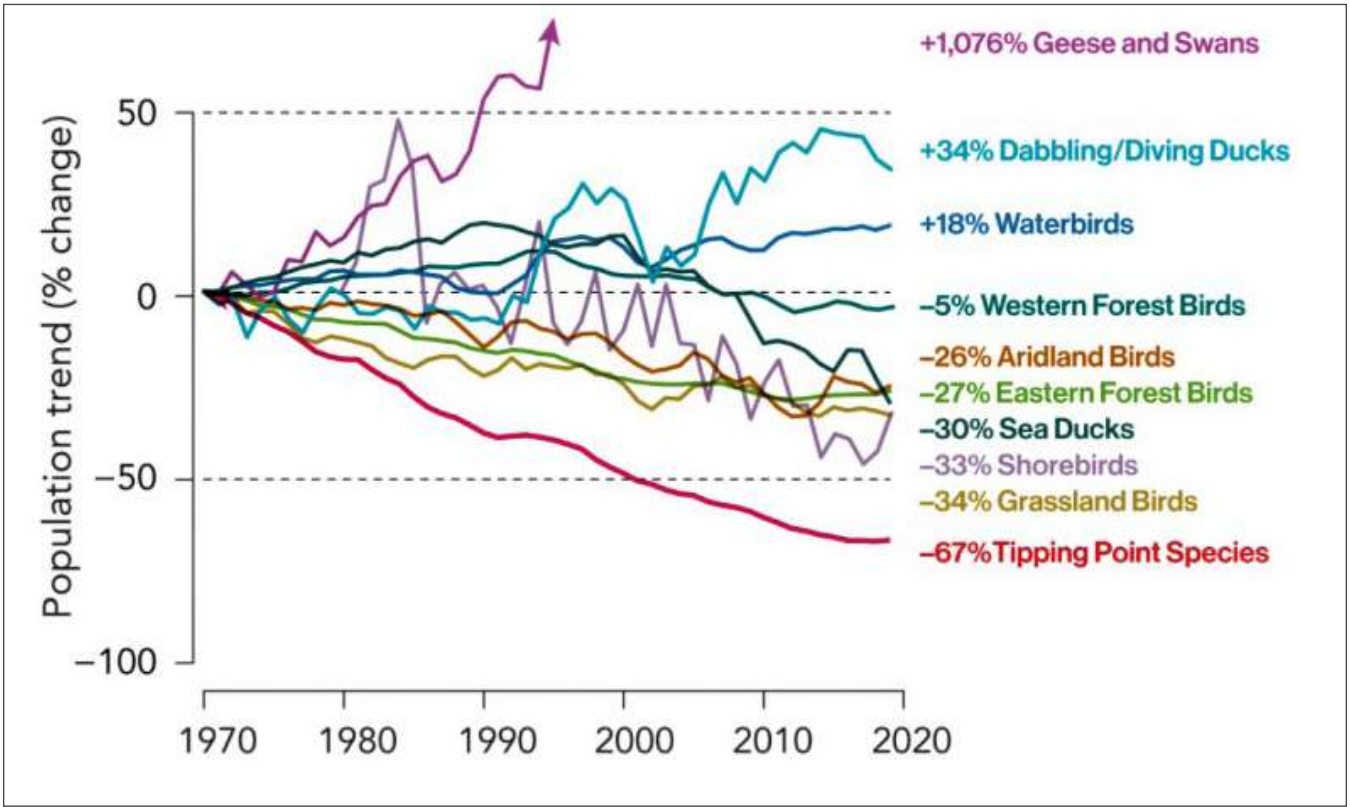
NEWS NOTES *cont from page 7*

On our hurting grasslands, Tammy VerCauteren of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies noted that while humans "have changed our grassland landscape," they are also "key to its future." To that end, the US, Canada, Mexico and native nations have formed the Central Grasslands Roadmap to try to conserve hundreds of millions of North American prairielands. Download the complete State of the Birds report at https://www.stateofthebirds.org/2022/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/state-of-the-birds-2022-spreads.pdf



State of Birds 2022 population trends by species group (Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

NEOTROPICAL MIGRANTS "ENHANCEMENT" BILL INTRO'D IN CONGRESS

In early October, a bipartisan bill to enhance the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. (A companion bill was introduced in the Senate earlier this year.) The existing law aims to conserve more than 350 bird species in the U.S. — species like Blackburnian Warbler, Scarlet Tanager and Purple Martin — that migrate to and from Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Canada annually. H.R. 9135, the Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act would boost investments in habitat, monitoring, research, education and outreach with more matching grants that catalyze and infuse non-federal spending on more than 650 projects in 40 states and territories, three dozen Latin American and Caribbean countries, and provinces and territories in Canada. The birds' economic value to humanity, measured by their role in ecotourism, farm pollination, seed dispersal and pest control, is impressive. Their attraction to birdwatchers alone is estimated to generate $95 million in economic output.

Emma Riley and Northern Harrier

Hawk Watch 2022: Looking Back, and Forward

Emma Riley
Monday, November 28
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

Emma Riley was the full-time hawk counter and daily on-site coordinator during the 10-week spring 2022 season of DFO's Hawk Watch program. In our final monthly evening program of the year, she will speak about national Hawk Watch efforts — where they are and why they matter — and present an update on the results and trends from this year's season on Dinosaur Ridge.

Riley is a raptor biologist and naturalist with a degree in wildlife biology from Colorado State University. Since graduating, she has worked with Ferruginous Hawks in Wyoming, breeding passerines across WY and Idaho, and more recently at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, MN, during fall migration.

And this fall, she has been counting Swainson's Hawks and other southbound migrants in New Mexico, stationed at Hawk Watch International's Manzanos Mountains migration site southeast of Albuquerque.

Raptor biology is Riley's passion, especially migration and movement ecology. One of her "spark birds" is Ferruginous Hawk, and Dinosaur Ridge is considered the best place in America to see migrating "Ferruges" in spring.

When not birding, she enjoys snowboarding, mountain biking, and hanging out with her dog and two cats in Fort Collins, either at home or at a local microbrewery.

To sign up for this free Nov. 28 Zoom presentation, click this registration link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_D0y4fU4sSwKXFvpWuCMkNg

You will receive a webinar link and subsequent reminders about connecting to Riley's program as the date approaches.

Swainson's Hawk juvenile
Jim Esten

Swainson's Hawk
Patrick O'Driscoll

CHRISTMAS COUNT

Denver Christmas Bird Count is Dec. 17

Yes, it's that time again, and every year, DFO members play a big part in covering all the areas of Audubon's annual Denver Christmas Bird Count. Here are all the details you need to know right now about joining the count. The best part is, everyone is invited to participate, from beginners to experts.

WHO / WHAT

68th Denver Christmas Bird Count, with DFO's **Joey Kellner** (303-978-1748, SWDenverBirding.@gmail.com) as count leader/compiler. This count in Denver's southwest suburbs is one of more than 2,500 "count" circles in National Audubon Society's 123rd national/international Christmas Bird Count, and one of more than 50 circles in Colorado alone. (There's also a separate "Denver Urban" count, led by longtime DFO and Denver Audubon member **Hugh Kingery**, that takes place on New Year's Day.) The overall National Audubon CBC is the US's longest-running community science project, and it now reaches across all the Americas and Pacific territories

WHEN

Saturday, Dec. 17, all day. The Denver count and all other counts take place on single days within a 23-day "count week" period throughout the National Audubon observance, beginning Dec. 12 and ending Jan. 5, 2023

WHERE

Inside a 15-mile diameter "count circle" that is centered roughly over Denver's southwestern suburban area *(see map)*

HOW

Count teams tally bird species and numbers in 24 "count areas" within that 15-mile circle, each led by a team leader *(see list)*

HOW TO JOIN

Consult the map to see which area count you'd like to join, then contact the area leader of that zone *(see leader list and numbered map)*. "That way, participants can talk to a real person about the area, how much walking is involved and over what terrain, as well as starting time, meeting location and so forth," says Kellner. And if you want to offer your help in an area that needs additional observers, contact Kellner himself *(email and phone details above)*

COST

No fees! And therefore, "No excuses!" says Kellner

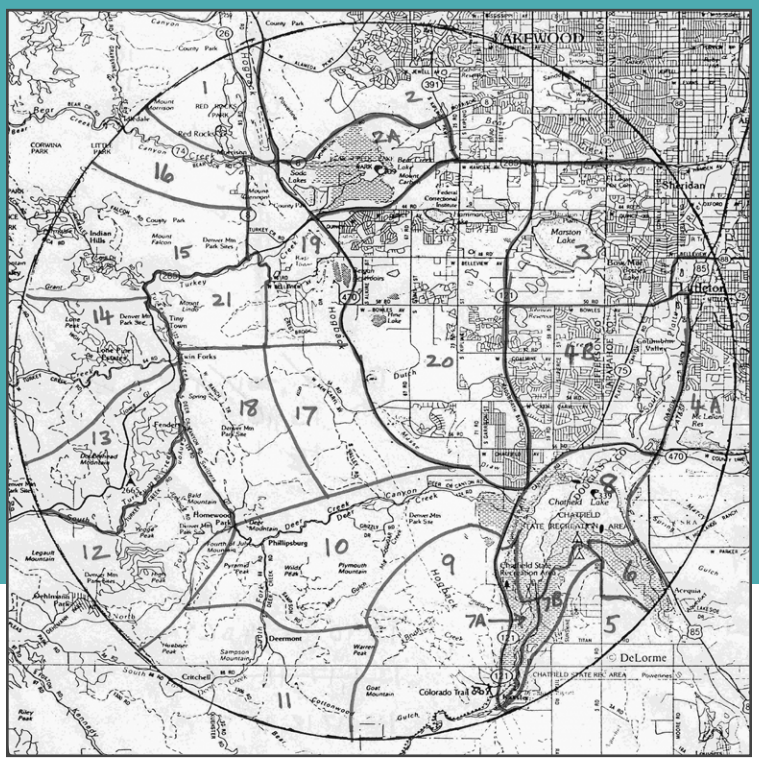
STILL NEEDED

Feeder count coordinator to oversee participants who count birds and species at their own feeders within the 15-mile circle. Interested? Contact Kellner *(contact details above)*

AFTERWARDS

After a day in the field, all participants are invited to attend the compilation meeting to warm up, chat with other birders, and find out how the count went. The compilation meeting convenes at about 5 p.m. Dec. 17 in the multipurpose room of Chatfield State Park headquarters (south side of Chatfield Reservoir near the Heronry Overlook).

Please note: State Parks vehicle entry pass required. Carpooling is strongly recommended.



AREA	NUMBER AND LOCATION	AREA LEADER	CONTACT INFO
1.	Red Rocks Park	Gregg Goodrich	303-655-9135
2.	Lower Bear Creek	Scott Somershoe	615-829-3573
2	A. Bear Creek Lake Park	Cyndy Johnson	303-378-1335
3.	Bow Mar/Marston	Mark Amershek	720-243-1521
4A.	Lower South Platte - East	Ed Holub	303-979-2194
4B.	Lower South Platte - West	Glenn Walbek	720-560-3671
5.	Highline Ditch	Nancy Crews	303-842-2833
6.	Plum Creek	Norm Erthal	303-917-2596
7A.	Middle South Platte - West	Sue Summers	253-678-3721
7B.	Middle South Platte - East	Frank Coons	970-640-9902
8.	Chatfield State Park	Joey Kellner	303-978-1748
9.	Upper South Platte **	Jill Holden	720-288-4018
10.	Lower Deer Creek (Chatfield Farms)	Barbra Sobhani	303-905-4718
11.	Upper Deer Creek	Paul Slingsby	720-347-5169
12.	Yegge Peak	Cynthia Madsen	303-770-6534
13.	Doublehead Mountain	Amy Davis	303-549-7759
14.	North Turkey Creek	Ed Furlong	303-956-8321
15.	Indian Hills	Dick Prickett	303-674-0217
16.	Upper Bear Creek	Laura Steadman	lauramsteadman@gmail.com
17.	Ken Caryl Ranch	David Suddjian	dsuddjian@gmail.com
18.	Garrison Gate	+ + LEADER NEEDED + +	
19.	Morrison/Willowbrook	Chris Gilbert	804-214-1508
20.	Willow Creek	Dale Pate	575-706-4584
21.	Mount Lindo/Willow Springs	Chris Sherry	303-807-3645

**** To participate in this area, contact leader no later than Nov. 22**

Laura Steadman

DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope:

Up close with Laura Steadman, sparked to birds at an infamous oil spill

Editor's note: IN THE SCOPE is a series of Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips and others who volunteer and participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email The Lark Bunting *at patodrisk@gmail.com*

Name: **Laura Steadman**
Home city: **Boulder**
Occupations: **Software engineer**

How/when I became a birder?

I started birding while working on the federal response to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico. When the explosion and spill happened that April, I was a GIS intern (maps, spatial data) with the National Park Service at Lake Mead NRA in Nevada. I put my name on the list of volunteers to travel down to the Gulf to work on the cleanup and restoration effort. I didn't get the call until after my internship ended and I had moved to upstate New York. But I answered the call and went to work for NPS at Perdido Key, FL, on the westernmost tip of the Panhandle. I was there for 60 days — 7 days a week, 14-plus hours a day, some of them on night shift. Most other folks volunteered for 2 weeks, so I got to work with a variety of Park Service, Forest Service, and Fish & Wildlife Service people from across the US.

With my background in archaeology, I went in as a "Natural Resource Advisor." My job was to make sure we weren't destroying the beaches while trying to remove the spilled oil. Among other tasks, I monitored sea turtle nests and made sure sand dunes and vegetation were protected. Another duty was to watch out for endangered shorebirds, plovers in particular. To me, they looked like every other shorebird; I knew practically nothing about birds. I had always thought birdwatching was a hobby that would never interest me.

Then came my "spark" bird, an encounter I remember like it was yesterday. Driving a golf cart down the beach to set up turtle protection for a late night's work, I slammed on the brakes for a large, black bird with a toucan-like bill. "Who do I have to call about *this*?!" I thought at first, concerned that endangered birds had to remain undisturbed. Surely this unusual one must be rare! Then I dug out my tri-fold guide to Gulf birds and discovered it was a Black Skimmer — completely common and ordinary for the area. But I was blown away that a bird so weird and cool-looking could be normal, even mundane. If I had been missing skimmers, what else was I missing? That was it. I've been birding ever since.

Returning to the Hudson River Valley of New York, I discovered I was living across the road from a wildlife management area along the river. What a GREAT place for a beginning birder! My long driveway was surrounded by wet meadows, a spectacular place to observe American Woodcock. Soon after, I joined a local bird listserv, went on some field trips, and participated in Christmas Bird Counts.

When/why I joined DFO?

When I moved to Colorado in 2012 in search of a "professional" job, I got involved with some Christmas counts that first winter at Chatfield and Barr Lake SPs, and others off and on. On the

Continued on page 13

frigid, windy day of my first Barr Lake count, I was assigned to a section just north of the Denver airport, birding fields all day from the car in freeze-thaw conditions, windows rolling up and down and the car heater blasting. But it was an AMAZING day because my section leader was the late, great **Joe Roller**, one of the state's premier birders and a tireless volunteer for DFO. Every time I saw Joe after that, he'd press DFO business cards into my hand.

Still distracted switching careers and homes, it took me awhile to join. But when I did (I think in 2017), it was because of DFO's great reputation as a birding group, and because I love birding with others.

First DFO trip I went on?

Gosh, I'm not sure I remember. A field trip to Bluff Lake in Denver stands out, as do some jaunts out to reservoirs on the Colorado Plains.

How/why I became a trip leader?

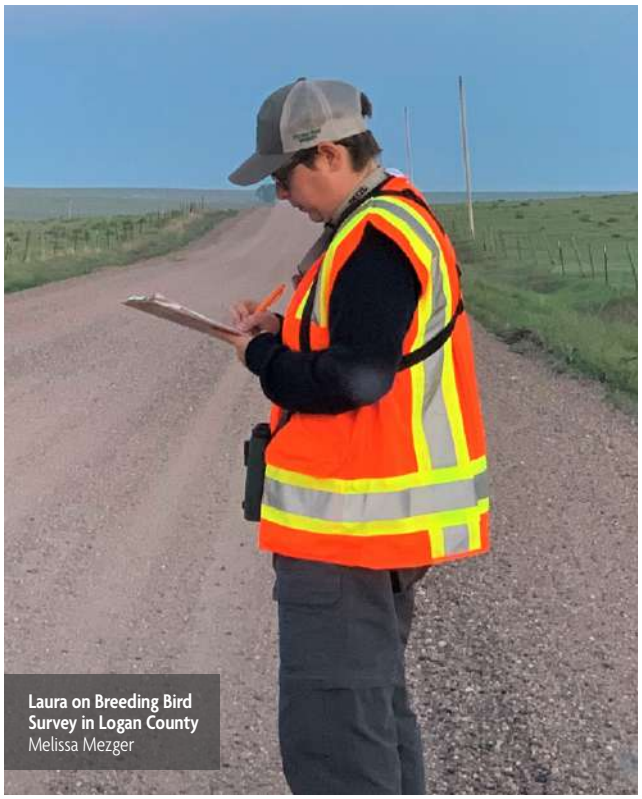
I first became sort of a "field trip leader" when the section leader for my Denver Christmas count retired from it. I still hike up and down that steep hill every winter! From there, I eventually started leading occasional trips for a couple of Boulder area groups. I even found excuses to lead outings for my non-birding coworkers. I became a DFO trip leader after **Chris Rurik**, whom I'd met on a couple of non-DFO field trips, advocated for me (thanks, Chris!). I knew DFO led great trips. I was excited for the opportunity to improve my skills as both a birder and trip leader.

First DFO trip I led?

I think it was to Walden Ponds in Boulder, a place I've birded a lot over the years. I've come to know in detail where to expect what: Warbling Vireos nest in this tree, Yellow Warblers over there, an owl roosts in that spot, the shrike in the winter likes that particular snag. It has a great variety of habitat, considering it's an old gravel pit mine turned into open space. Lots of parking and a pit toilet, too! (Did I mention fireflies on summer evenings?)

Favorite place to go birding?

I love to go camping. I began as a way to explore places on the cheap, but now I love it for getting me outside, connecting



Laura on Breeding Bird Survey in Logan County
Melissa Mezger

On night shift duty at Gulf oil spill

Continued on page 14

with nature and, well, still exploring relatively inexpensively. One of my favorite things to do on weekend campouts is to spend time at the campsite (any campsite) observing the birds and other wildlife around me. It's surprising how many species you can tick off while just sitting with your morning coffee in the woods!

Even more rewarding, camping allows me to slow down and really observe what's going on around me. On a recent trip to New Mexico, I spent hours watching a trio of Cassin's Kingbirds. Another time, in southern Colorado, I lay awake listening to Violet-Green Swallows singing in the middle of the night. I'd had the incredibly good fortune to have pitched my tent under their nest tree.

That was in Alvarado Campground, in Custer County, which I guess might qualify as a favorite place. Birding and adventuring there is just phenomenal. In summer, Alvarado is loaded with Black-headed Grosbeaks, Warbling Vireos and more. Great hiking trails take off right from the campground. Just downhill are Lewis's Woodpeckers. (One note: the campsites there are of pretty mixed quality, so if you go, choose carefully.)

Scoping Rifle Gap birds from camper-van in January
Melissa Mezger

Best DFO field trip ever?

They're all great, each in its own way. Don't make me choose! I especially enjoy those in which trip leaders share places they love and know so well. A trip last spring with **Donna Stumpp** and **Peter Ruprecht** to Standley Lake in Westminster showed me new spots to bird and reminded me of great places I'd already been.

My field trip philosophy and style?

I try to lead relaxed trips where we take time so that everyone gets time to see the birds, learn about them, and ask questions. I do a lot of birding by ear, so I share what I'm hearing and try to help others hear it, too. I also like the plants, rocks, history, and other things along the field trip trail, so I throw a bit of that into my trips, too. I'm a walker, so my trips also will keep you moving!

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

I'd love to see a migration fallout along the Gulf Coast, or maybe Cape May in New Jersey. Or maybe the Biggest Week in American Birding at Magee Marsh in Ohio ("The Warbler Capital of the World"). It would be neat to experience the huge numbers of birds that move through these places all at once.

Continued on page 15

IN THE SCOPE *cont from page 14*

The next trip I'm leading?

I'm so excited for the Denver Christmas Bird Count in December. I do a 3.5-mile hike out of Morrison every year. One year, it was snowshoeing in minus-2 degrees! I've done it every year since moving to Colorado, (except for 2020 when we all took a break for the pandemic). I also love field trips to look at ducks in the winter, so be on the lookout for a South Platte River field trip.

A place I haven't led a trip yet but want to?

It could be really fun to lead an outing to Logan County in northeast Colorado. I do a USGS Breeding Bird Survey route out there near North Sterling SP. It hasn't seen that many birders over the years, and I'm convinced a few spots along my route are migrant traps waiting to be found. I love the dawn chorus on the Great Plains there. Just you, the birds, and in the distance, wind turbines turning silently. There are more meadowlarks and Horned Larks than you can count, and Lark Buntings, Lark Sparrows, and reliable spots to find Grasshopper Sparrow, a species few of us get to spend time with. Last spring, Logan was very dry, and so there were Cassin's Sparrows singing in a few spots. There are quite a few pronghorn out there, too, a favorite sight. North Sterling Reservoir offers a nice contrast, with pelicans cruising about and riparian habitat to explore. And if you camp in Chimney View Campground in June, Common Nighthawks provide quite a show overhead in the evening, often with thunderstorms and lightning not far away.

My love for camping compels me to add: It would be GREAT to lead a camping-and-birding trip somewhere.

Some of the birds Laura worked to protect from oil spill
Laura Steadman

OCTOBER PROGRAM REVIEW

Hired to deal with Colorado forest pests, Leatherman fell for Ponderosas and birds, too

David Leatherman on Zoom

View the complete video of "Life History of the Best Tree in Our World" With David Leatherman in the Past Programs archive on the DFO website: https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx

Marc Strong

Longtime Colorado state forest entomologist **David Leatherman**, now retired, got his start when a major pine beetle epidemic swept into the state in the mid-1970s. Nearly 50 years later, there's no one in Colorado more suited than this bird-loving, career bug man to explain why the Ponderosa Pine, Leatherman's favorite conifer, is "the best tree in our world."

Hired under an urgent appropriation from the Colorado Legislature, "I jumped into the fray of the pine beetle," Leatherman recalled as he began his DFO evening program Oct. 22 before about 90 listener-viewers via Zoom. Throughout the 1-1/2-hour talk, Leatherman enthralled them with enough remarkable facts, cultural history and biological details about this special tree to fill a book. Its keystone role in western ecosystems encompasses the lives of innumerable insects, fungi, parasites, soils, other plants, land animals and, of course, birds.

The various tree species that young Leatherman had been hired to protect from bugs included the Ponderosa, a resilient family of at least four native subspecies across the West (and also the most widely distributed conifer in North America). He said he soon became "very fond of the Ponderosa . . . It's beautiful to look at, it smells good, and I spent a lot of years wandering around" in Ponderosa forests in pursuit of the insects that live there.

And where there are bugs, there are birds. Leatherman, who himself has checklisted 460 of the 519 avian species ever recorded in Colorado, said more than 100 of them live in Ponderosa forests — nesting, foraging, taking winter shelter or stopping over in migration, some of them "deeply entwined" in the life of the tree.

He began his talk by describing the tree itself — its bark (vanilla-scented, with resin-filled "dimples" and changing colors and textures from ridged to jigsaw-puzzled), its needles (usually in bundles of three), its cones (sharp "prickles" at the tip), its buds (brownish red) and the many names we call it, from blackjack (young trees with dark bark) and rock pine (for the soil) to bull pine and western yellow pine. The *Pinus ponderosa scopulorum* subspecies (Rocky Mountain) predominates in Colorado, but *Pinus ponderosa brachyptera* (Southwest) is found in south-southwest parts of the state. And yes, Ponderosas grow tall and are long-lived — up to 125 feet in Colorado and at least 800 years (the state's oldest).

All that thick, ridged bark on a mature Ponderosa's trunk is largely fire resistant. "Ponderosa pine and fire are a marriage made in heaven," Leatherman said, though human encroachment on Ponderosa habitat has disrupted the natural cycle between burnings. Although he calls Ponderosa "probably the most sustainable of all the pines," Leatherman foresees future conflict over climate change-fueled wildfire and pressure from continued human settlement of forested zones. He suggested that could mean overgrooming of forests, depriving Ponderosas of the periodic wildland fire they require to thrive long-term.

So many kinds of creatures rely on or co-exist with Ponderosa Pine. Leatherman took note of dwarf mistletoe, a parasite that grows on the trees. He said the parasite even provides odd entertainment to foresters in the field. Just touching the plant can trigger it to shoot out its seeds explosively. It's a spectacle with a purpose: The expelled seeds fly up to 60 feet away to infest new trees nearby.

More beneficial are mycorrhizal fungi, symbiotic species that improve the Ponderosa's ability to absorb water and nutrients and protects trees against soil pathogens. Leatherman lamented that today's hotter-burning crown forest fires kill the fungus and deprive Ponderosas of that benefit.

Continued on page 17

PROGRAM REVIEW *cont from page 16*

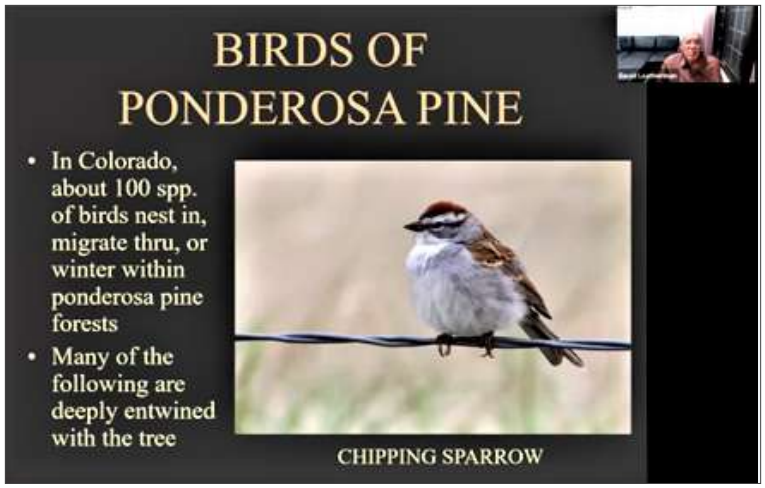
Among many ground animals in Ponderosa forests, Abert's Squirrel, tassel-eared denizen of the southern Rockies, is "an indicator of Ponderosa Pine health," Leatherman said. It depends on older trees for food. Porcupines, meanwhile, climb Ponderosas to feed on their inner bark.

Leatherman displayed an insect zoo's worth of screen images of beetles, wasps, ants, aphids, wood borers and other invertebrates, from the bright-blue Pleasing Fungus Beetle to Ponderosa Needleminer larvae to Pine Tiger Moth caterpillars, which camp out in winter in white "tents" on pine branches. Pine beetle, the critter responsible for his hiring as a Colorado forest entomologist, is a prime example of "the old ecological concept of keystone species" because so many other species revolve around it. Pine forests naturally die and are reborn either by fire or beetles, sometimes on cycles as long as 300 years.

Which brought Leatherman back to the birds. He said woodpeckers are a wonderful indicator of forest health because they crave pine beetles. Hairy Woodpeckers, in particular, were Leatherman's "buddies out in the forest" because they so often accompanied him as he looked for signs of pine beetle. But he also offered wonderful examples of other birds that live, breed and survive in Ponderosa Pine forests, among them:

- Steller's Jay, "the poster child for birds in Ponderosa Pine" for its strong association with the tree
- Band-tailed Pigeon, first found in Colorado among Ponderosas near present-day Sedalia in 1820 by the Long Expedition
- Broad-tailed Hummingbird, many of which nest in lower branches of Ponderosas
- Clark's Nutcracker, with its penchant for Ponderosa seeds
- Acorn Woodpecker, which caches Gambel oak seeds in beetle-killed Ponderosas known as "granary trees" for that role

Leatherman ended his talk by speculating about what new birds might occupy Colorado's Ponderosa forests as climate change deepens. Greater Pewee, perhaps? Flame-colored Tanager? Magnificent Hummingbird? All three (and others he mentioned) would be new to the state. If Leatherman can imagine welcoming them into the realm of the Ponderosa Pine, we should all stay tuned.


BIRDS OF
PONDEROSA PINE
• In Colorado, about 100 spp. of birds nest in, migrate thru, or winter within ponderosa pine forests
• Many of the following are deeply entwined with the tree
CHIPPING SPARROW

Bird stats from program

Ponderosa bark flakes like a jigsaw puzzle

PONDEROSA PINE
Pinus ponderosae
Other common names: bull pine, western yellow pine, rock pine, blackjack pine, many more
Our subspecies is P. ponderosa scopulorum (the subspecies in southwestern CO is Pinus ponderosa brachyptera)
Smells like vanilla (mix of terpenes)
Can grow to 125' tall in Colorado (tallest anywhere is 268' (California)!)
Oldest living in CO is ~800 at Mt. Rosa w. of Colorado Springs
Oldest ever recorded was 1047 at Mesa Verde *
P. ponderosa

Ponderosa factsheet

Marc Strong, who joined DFO in 2021, is a lab tech by day and grad student in science writing by night. His grandmother taught him to love watching birds, and now, he endeavors to write about them.

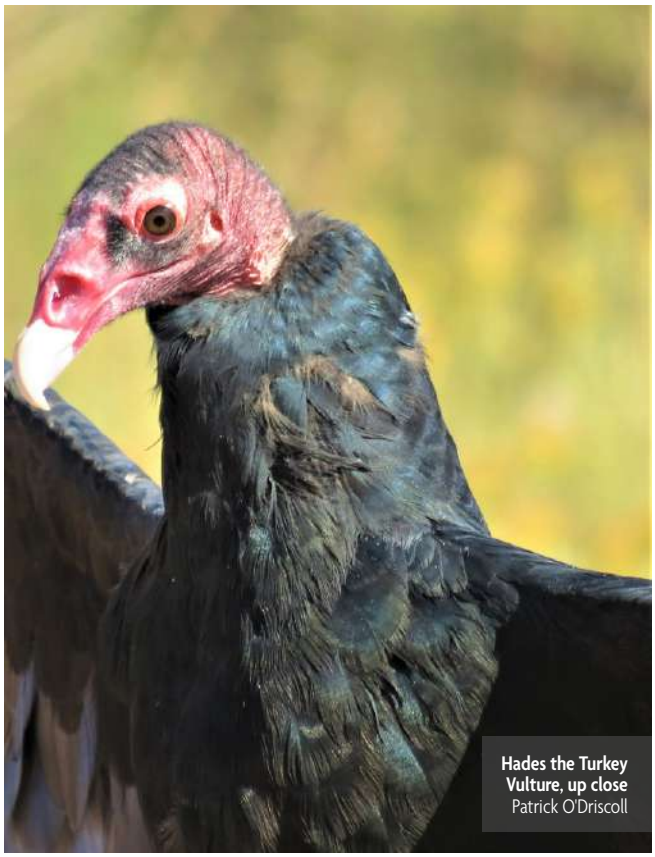
Aurora the Golden Eagle
Patrick O'Driscoll

HAWKTOBER!

From live raptors *thiscloseup* to a field trip in the sky, a Hawktober to remember

Continued on page 19

Aurora with Mackenzie Welch
Jim Esten



Hades the Turkey Vulture, up close
Patrick O'Driscoll

American Kestrel and fans
Patrick O'Driscoll

Patrick O'Driscoll
If you couldn't be there, close your eyes and you can probably picture it:

Amphitheater audience, suddenly buzzing in unseasonable October heat. Special guests arriving (fashionably late, a quarter past 1 p.m.), a parade of seven travel boxes. Audience, silent and waiting through 15 minutes of welcomes, thank you's and introductions. Then, murmurs rising into oohs and ahhs as **Freyja** the Red-tailed Hawk emerges from her box on the wrist of a young woman.

And for the next hour and a half, the team from Nature's Educators has about 100 bird lovers rapt and in the palms of its leather-gloved hands.

What a way to kick off Denver Field Ornithologists' special fall Raptor Education Program, better known in these pages as **Hawktober**. In the second week of October, the DFO Hawk Watch Committee staged a three-part series of programs designed to both educate and entertain. The ultimate goal: To sharpen attendees' raptor identification skills so that they might join Hawk Watch volunteers next spring to count migrating birds of prey along the hogback spine of Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County.

That amphitheater scene was the opening event on Sunday, Oct. 9, at Denver Audubon's Kingery Nature Center south of Chatfield State Park: A birds-of-prey show by Nature's Educators, a Colorado nonprofit wildlife program that uses animal "ambassadors" — rehabbed but unreleasable wild things — to bring nature to life for audiences of all ages.

Three days later, Hawk Watch Committee chair **Dave Hill** led 103 participants through "Hawks in Flight ID Skills," an Oct. 12 evening class in raptor identification via webinar. Attendees learned how to ID local hawk species on the wing using flight styles, plumage and shape to distinguish them from each other,

Three days after that, 30 participants in either or both of those programs joined Hawk Watch hosts to practice their new skills at the Dinosaur Ridge observation point. The special field outing on Saturday, Oct. 15, was so popular that an overflow group of eight more participants went up the next day for the same session with seasoned DFO hawk watchers.

Continued on page 20

HAWTOBER! *cont from page 19*

The virtual classroom and field practice were worthy pursuits, but for the sheer appeal of charismatic avifauna, the Nature's Educators session was sublime. Besides Freyja, bird handlers **Mackenzie Welch** and **Emilee Caudill** displayed and sometimes walked through the video- and picture-snapping audience with six other handsome examples of birds of prey that spend part or all of the year in Colorado: **Tater Tot** the American Kestrel, utterly cute (and smaller than expected); **Hades** the Turkey Vulture, quiet and tranquil; **Brizo** the Osprey, alert and wide-eyed; **Boreas** the Swainson's Hawk, impossibly handsome; **Vitani** the Prairie Falcon, nervous and plaintive, and **Aurora** the Golden Eagle, simply regal.

Live and up so close, each displayed wild beauty, exuded magnetism, and frankly, took the breath away.

Continued on page 21

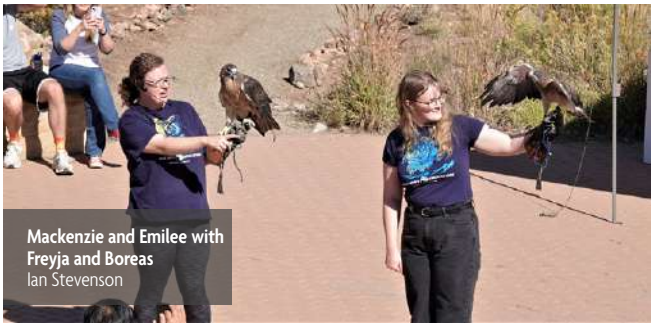
Audience rapt for raptors
Patrick O'Driscoll

Emilee Caudill with Freyja the Red-tailed Hawk
Ian Stevenson

HAWTOBER! *cont from page 20*

The Hawk Watch Committee saluted DFO's collaborators and financial supporters in its migration season activities, including Denver Audubon, Jefferson County Open Space, Colorado Field Ornithologists, the Hawk Migration Association of North America, and Nature's Educators.

The committee also thanked the volunteers and other participants who made the trio of events go so smoothly. They include: **Ajit Antony**, **Susan Blansett**, **Karl Brummert**, **Emilee Caudill**, **Carol Cwiklinski**, **Jim Esten**, **Mike Fernandez**, **Paul Grenier**, **David Hill**, **Kathy Holland**, **Devin Jaffe**, **Jane Lee**, **Mike Lupini, Janet Peters**, **Steve Small**, **Ian Stevenson**, **Kate TenEyck**, **Sharon Tinianow**, and **MacKenzie Welch**.



Mackenzie and Emilee with Freyja and Boreas
Ian Stevenson

Brizo the Osprey
Ian Stevenson

Photo ops everywhere
Patrick O'Driscoll

HAWTOBER! *cont from page 21*

Tater Tot the American Kestrel
Ian Stevenson

Boreas the Swainson's Hawk
Patrick O'Driscoll

Vitani the Prairie Falcon
Patrick O'Driscoll.

FIELD TRIPS

Field Tripping: "Big Sit!" @ Chatfield SP is annual exercise in birding s-l-o-w-l-y

The trip: The Big Sit! — Heronry Overlook, Chatfield State Park (JeffCo)
Date: Sunday, October 9, 2022
Leader: Joey Kellner + 50 participants
Species: 56 on 14 eBird checklists (https://ebird.org/tripreport/79842)

Watching high and low
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 24

FIELD TRIPPING *cont from page 23*

Patrick O'Driscoll

The first thing to know about The Big Sit! (exclamation point included) is that hardly anyone sits. Most of the time, for most of the participants, it's The Big Stand.

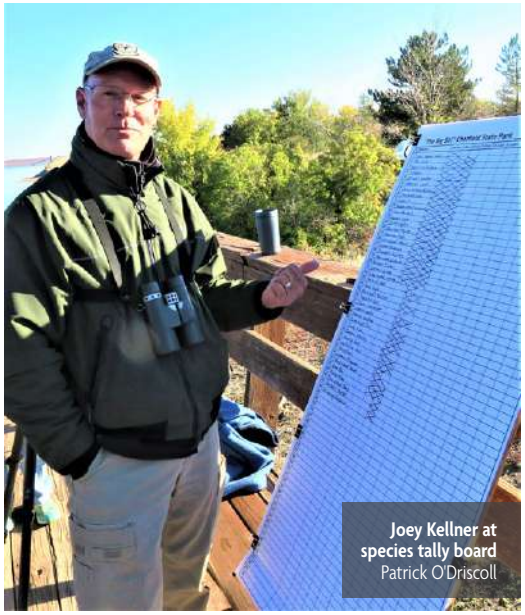
Yes, there are benches on the Heronry Overlook deck at Chatfield State Park, where longtime DFO trip leader **Joey Kellner** has led this exercise in patient, immobile observation since 2003 (with a two-year timeout for COVID-19). In his annual open invitation, Kellner encourages participants to BYOC — bring your own chair.

As a first-timer, I brought mine. It sat unopened, against the side of the viewing platform, the whole four hours I was there. Not that I'm complaining. This is the charm and the genius of The Big Sit. When there are so many people hawkeyeing for any and all birds within scoping distance, you quickly resolve not to miss even one. No time for sitting!

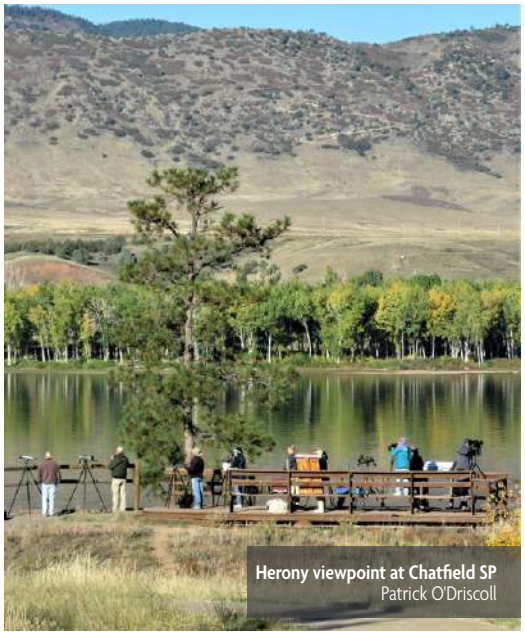
And yet, all day long to linger and get to know this species or that. No hurry, no need to keep up when your whole field trip stays put. "Looking at these birds over and over and over again is one of the ways to learn birds," said **Lynne Forrester**, a regular attending at least her seventh Big Sit! "You never stop looking, and you always see something different. It's also good for people who have mobility issues."

The 2022 crew of Big Sitters — 50 total participants across about 14 hours, as many as 20 of them at once — lined the Heronry Overlook deck and adjacent fence, sometimes elbow to elbow, scanning the skies above the southwest reach of Chatfield Reservoir. No one walked or wandered farther away ("Sit" in this case means "Don't move"), but with so many watchers, few birds went un-ID'd.

Continued on page 25

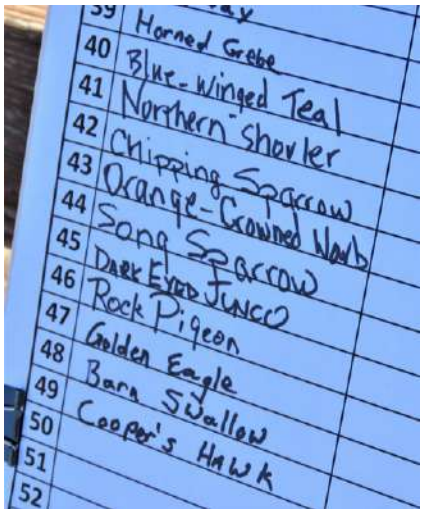


Joey Kellner at species tally board
Patrick O'Driscoll



Herony viewpoint at Chatfield SP
Patrick O'Driscoll

Mid-morning crowd along the rail
Patrick O'Driscoll



FIELD TRIPPING *cont from page 24*

When I arrived about 3 hours after the official start ("dawn to dusk, come for an hour or stay all day"), Kellner's crew had already posted more than 40 species. He scribbled each in Magic Marker on a big tally board, with vertical columns to check off species sighted each hour. By day's end, 56 species were seen or heard, from a pair of dueting Great Horned Owls at zero-dark 5:30 a.m. to a flock of 300 European Starlings in the final 6 p.m. hour.

At times it felt like a backyard barbecue (minus the brats and burgers), with old birding friends sharing scopes instead of beers. Other times, all was quiet as all eyes, binocs and scopes focused on some distant bird. Is that a Golden Eagle? This day, that species played hard to get, drifting in and out of view over faraway ridges and hogbacks west of the park.

At the top of each hour, Kellner announced, "OK, new checklist. Everybody start scanning. Anything new, say something." After five minutes of silent, intent birding, he stood at the tally board and read aloud the previously seen species, waiting a moment after each for a "yes" from whomever may have seen it again. Then it was 55 more minutes of any and all birds, old and new.

"Every year is different, but it's amazing what you can find standing in place all day," said Kellner, who got the idea from the New Haven (CT) Bird Club, which created the Big Sit! In 1992 and has since trademarked it as an international, free-to-all event of "semi-competitive" birding-in-place. There are other "Big Sit!" circles in Colorado; this one is co-hosted by DFO and Colorado Parks & Wildlife.

"It's amazing what shows up that you didn't expect," Kellner added. Over 18 years, his immovable birding feast has recorded 136 total species from its perch on a low bluff above the water. The high count was 75 in both 2018 and 2019; the least was 52 in 2007. As conventional birding wisdom goes, there are usually more species in years of inclement weather than picture-perfect days like this warm, sunny one. (The tally was low but respectable.)

Now and then, other parkgoers stopped by, wondering what all the scopes and binoculars were looking at. They included "a family with a special-needs son who was really excited to see an American White Pelican through a scope," Kellner reported, as well as "a few very young, soon-to-be birders someday,"

Asked about the underlying "why" of standing in place to wait for birds to come, Kellner said he doesn't overthink it. The data "still all goes to eBird," so there's no special ornithological purpose to this particular event. "It's just something fun to do. And as long as people enjoy it, I'll continue to do it."

I did enjoy it, and I'll be back. How about you? If you can stand it, see you at the next Big Sit!

Photos top to bottom: **Species tally board, Joey Kellner, scoping, Mountain Chickadee, Townsend's Solitaires** (Patrick O'Driscoll)

SUPPORTING DFO

As Daylight Saving ends, begin tax saving with a year-end donation

Roger Koester

With the 2023 New Year less than two months away, now is a great time to put your good and charitable actions to work for your 2022 tax year bottom line, too.

Dec. 31, 2022 is the deadline to make any charitable gift to a nonprofit enterprise eligible for an income tax deduction when you file your 2022 return next year. And if you're over age 70½ (or age 72 if you turn after the year 2020), there's good reason to make a gift of some of your required minimum withdrawal from an IRA, your "Individual Retirement Account."

Remember from the news over the past two years that the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act) waived such mandatory withdrawals? That pandemic-era waiver expired last year, so required minimum withdrawals are with us still — and that means you must pay income tax on the taxable amount of your withdrawal.

That's important for charitable giving because people who take this "Required Minimum Distribution" (RMD for short) can donate some or all of that distribution tax free if they do so directly to a qualified nonprofit. Speaking of which, guess what organization happens to be a qualified nonprofit? Yes indeed, Denver Field Ornithologists and its three funds for worthwhile club action: the DFO Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund, DFO's spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count, and Friends of DFO (club general fund).

Actually, if you fit in this category you can make such direct donations any time during the year, whenever you make these required withdrawals from retirement savings.

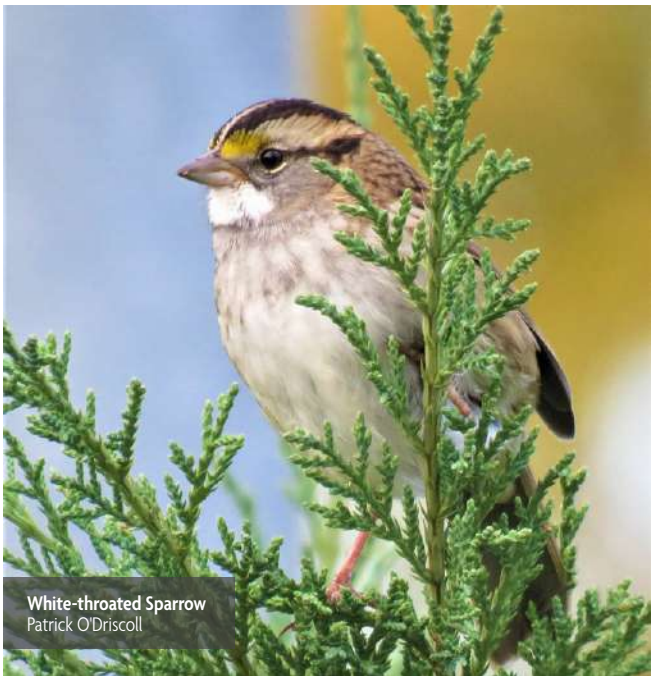
Forgive one more abbreviation, but it's an important one: QCD, short for "Qualified Charitable Distribution." That's one of these RMD donations is. If you are now required to take a minimum distribution from retirement savings in 2022, consider this strategy to make some or all of it a QCD, which reduces your taxable income by the amount of that donation. You don't even need to itemize your taxes to do this, either. It's a direct reduction in taxable income. And in this scenario, when you win, so does DFO.

One important caveat to keep in mind: Whatever amount you choose to contribute to charity as a QCD *must* be donated directly from your IRA to DFO or any qualifying nonprofit. If you withdraw the funds first and then donate, it doesn't count and won't win you the tax exemption.

Know this, too: Additional restrictions may apply for some individuals. For more about all of this and its effect on your situation, contact your tax adviser or retirement provider first.

And by the way, speaking of itemizing or not itemizing, here's a reminder on a semi-related topic. Congress did *not* renew for 2022 a tax provision that allowed taxpayers who don't itemize to deduct charitable contributions of $300 to $600 (single vs. marred status) more simply, i.e., without itemizing. So when you file your 2022 taxes in 2023, it's back to itemize, itemize, itemize when deducting any charitable contribution.

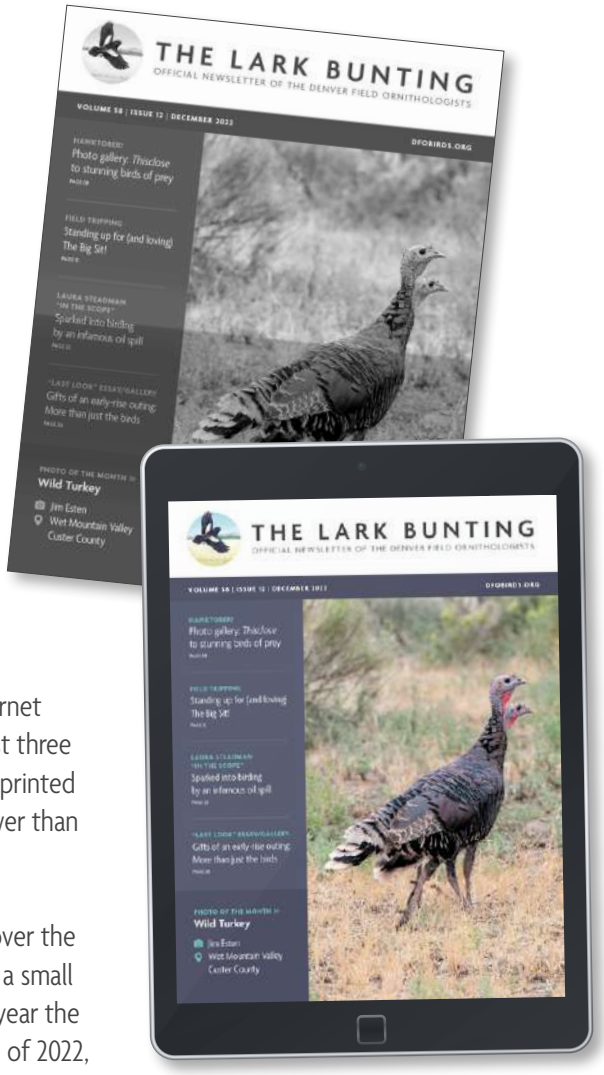
Roger Koester, a DFO member since 2018, is chair of the Finance Committee and a member of the DFO Board. Before retiring, he worked in student financial aid for several universities and was active in national, state, and regional professional associations.



White-throated Sparrow
Patrick O'Driscoll

LAST WORD

After 57 years, goodbye to printed-on-paper version of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter



Patrick O'Driscoll, editor

With this issue of *The Lark Bunting*, the Denver Field Ornithologists is printing the newsletter on paper for the final time.

Almost all DFO members already read the club newsletter on your internet device of choice once we post it on the DFO website. But over the past three years, a dwindling list of subscribers opting for (and paying more for) a printed black-and-white copy of the full-color online version has shrunk to fewer than 10 members.

In discussions with the DFO Communications & Outreach Committee over the past couple of years, our newsletter staff concluded that printing such a small number of copies was unnecessarily costly and impractical. Earlier this year the committee recommended discontinuing the printed version at the end of 2022, and the DFO Board concurred.

With next month's issue, the change frees our newsletter design from the restriction of printing-press format. Like a printed newspaper or magazine with articles and photos on both sides of the page, we have often had to either squeeze down or pad and expand *The Lark Bunting*'s content and layout to fit the even number of pages required for printing on a printshop press.

This means the January 2023 issue (coming out in December 2022) and any future issue can end on an odd-numbered page. That way, we also can devote the last page to newsletter content instead of the partly blank "mailer" page that, when folded and taped, served as the postal address "wrap" around the paper newsletter. We are experimenting with new one-page features for this "back" page, such as a "Last Look" photo, short guest essay, or an occasional note from the editor. Got an idea for our virtual back page? Let me know at patodrisk@gmail.com.

The actual print "run" for this month's final paper issue of the newsletter is just 13 copies: nine for individual member-subscribers, one for *The Lark Bunting* editor's files, two for the Denver Museum of Nature & Science (where DFO's club archives reside) and one for the Denver Public Library's Western History department.

In advance of ending the printed-paper version, DFO President **Susan Blansett** contacted the few remaining print subscribers to explain. A number of them are longtime members who for various reasons preferred a black-and-white hard copy by mail. One such reader, 95-year-old **Jan Justice-Waddington**, who served as DFO president 1981-82, replied to Blansett with understanding —

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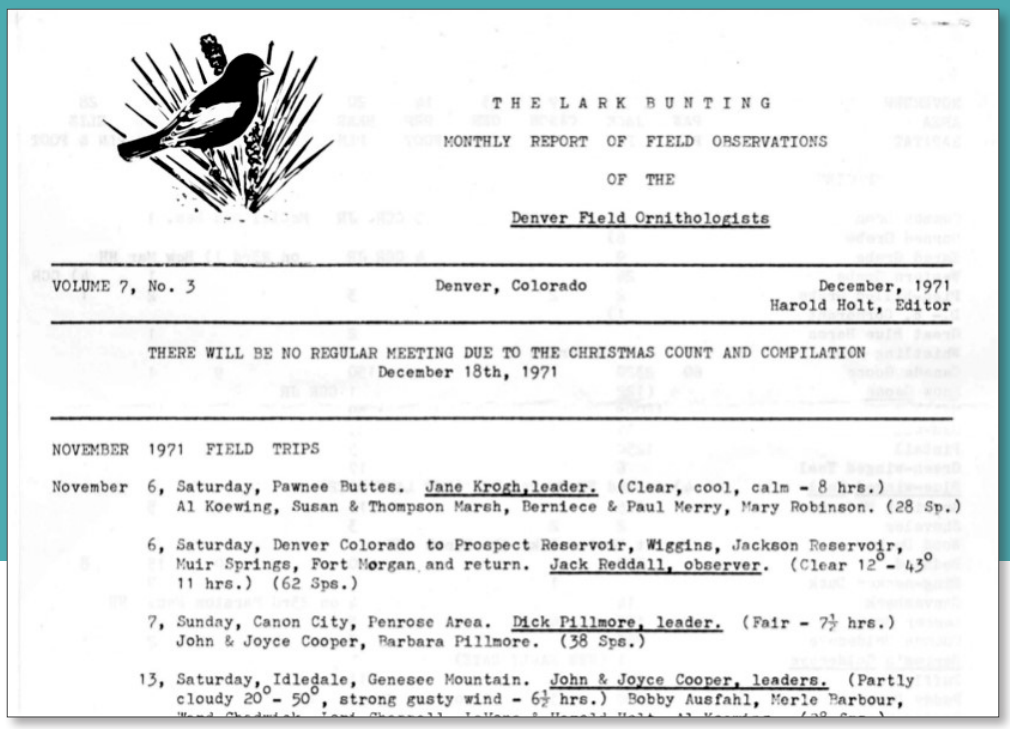


THE LARK BUNTING

MONTHLY REPORT OF FIELD OBSERVATIONS

OF THE

Denver Field Ornithologists

VOLUME 7, No. 3 — Denver, Colorado — December, 1971
Harold Holt, Editor

THERE WILL BE NO REGULAR MEETING DUE TO THE CHRISTMAS COUNT AND COMPILATION
December 18th, 1971

NOVEMBER 1971 FIELD TRIPS

November 6, Saturday, Pawnee Buttes. Jane Krogh, leader. (Clear, cool, calm - 8 hrs.)
Al Koewing, Susan & Thompson Marsh, Berniece & Paul Merry, Mary Robinson. (28 Sp.)

6, Saturday, Denver Colorado to Prospect Reservoir, Wiggins, Jackson Reservoir, Muir Springs, Fort Morgan and return. Jack Reddall, observer. (Clear 12° - 43° 11 hrs.) (62 Sps.)

7, Sunday, Canon City, Penrose Area. Dick Pillmore, leader. (Fair - 7½ hrs.)
John & Joyce Cooper, Barbara Pillmore. (38 Sps.)

13, Saturday, Idledale, Genesee Mountain. John & Joyce Cooper, leaders. (Partly cloudy 20° - 50°, strong gusty wind - 6½ hrs.) Bobby Ausfahl, Merle Barbour,

Cover detail, first issue labeled *The Lark Bunting*, in 1971

LAST WORD *cont from page 27*

and also with the news that she has now acquired an iPad "so at least I can read the daily newspaper and *The Lark Bunting* in a comfortable chair, away from my PC."

Ironically, in May 2004, when DFO first gave members an "electronic Lark Bunting option" of a newsletter by email instead of on paper by postal mail, a similarly small number — just 30 members — signed up to go "paperless." The following month, the club tried to drum up more interest, listing the advantages of email delivery:

- *Receive* The Lark Bunting *on a timely basis, not dependent on the printer or the Post Office*
- *Reduce DFO's printing and postage costs*
- *Hard copy available by printing from the email*

Thus began delivery of *The Lark Bunting* as most of you know it today, though now it's simply an email blurb with a weblink to the full-color PDF newsletter on the DFO website. With subsequent redesign of the website, more use of full color, and greater acceptance of paperless delivery, most members over the years gradually shifted their newsletter reading to computer and, eventually, tablets and smartphones.

Today's newsletter is a long way from its origins in September 1965 as a modest, two-page flier. It coincided with the renaming of the Colorado Bird Club (DFO's original name from 1935) to Denver Field Ornithologists. The late **Lynn Willcockson**, then DFO president and the newsletter's first editor, printed it at home on a now-ancient office facsimile copier. "Lynn told us of using a mimeograph in their kitchen to print those first newsletters," longtime DFO member **Mary Cay Burger** said of Willcockson, who died last June.

For the first six years, its name was a mouthful: *MONTHLY REPORT OF FIELD OBSERVATIONS of the Denver Field Ornithologists*. That's because its contents were just that: Monthly lists of species, participants and other details of the club's field trips (all details now preserved in electronic records on the DFO website). In December 1971, the name was changed to *The Lark Bunting* to honor the official state bird.

Aspen
Kathy Holland

LAST LOOK

On rising early: Glorious gifts besides the birds

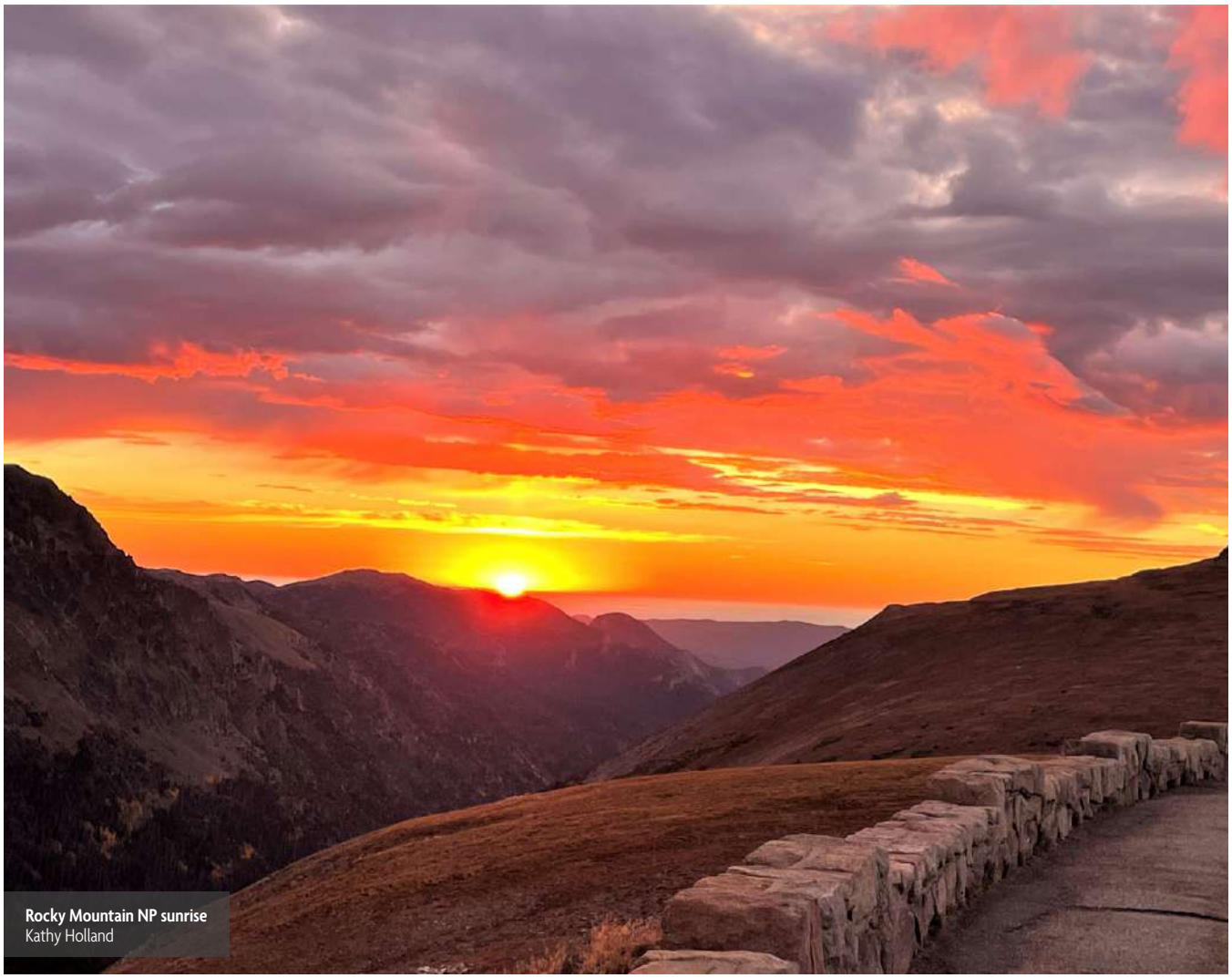
Kathy Holland

One benefit of getting up early to bird is what else you experience at that hour. Sunrise from the top of the Rockies. Dawn's glow on a wall of volcanic stone. Aspen in autumn gold. Bugles of bull elk, echoing off rocks and ridges.

In late September, I overnighted in Estes Park, eager to see molting White-tailed Ptarmigan along Trail Ridge Road in Rocky Mountain National Park. I wanted to be there early, as other birders seemed to have better luck at first light. But I didn't want to get up at 3 a.m. for the drive up, so with a promise of free rooms and dinner, I persuaded my sisters to come along. The place we stayed was off the beaten path, where light-pollution is frowned upon. And so we had a sky FULL of stars. A good omen?

Continued on page 30

White-tailed Ptarmigan
Kathy Holland



Rocky Mountain NP sunrise
Kathy Holland

A DFO member since retiring in 2019, **Kathy Holland** is the club's treasurer. A California native who moved at age 8 with her family to Littleton, she returned to Colorado in 2017 after 14 years in New Mexico.

Early the next morning, we drove up Trail Ridge Road to Lava Cliffs overlook, where many people had seen or heard my target bird. While my sisters sat in the warmth of the car, I stepped out into the low 30s, not including the chill of a galing wind. For 10 cold minutes, I looked in vain for ptarmigan. I heard only the wind and elk bugling in the distance. I snapped the sunrise and got back inside.

Already near the summit, we continued toward Alpine Visitor Center to try another spot. As I drove, the sister on the passenger side suddenly called out: "There's one! Stop! Back up." Fortunately, no one was behind us, so back we went, and there they were: Six White-tailed Ptarmigan in molting plumage. I leaned over her lap to get a few snapshots. Success!

Even if I hadn't seen them, it was a wonderful time. I birded a few other spots but saw nothing out of the ordinary; I didn't take another picture of a bird. Instead, I shot the beautiful scenery. And as we left the park we found a great cafe near the entrance, with fabulous pastries to celebrate our morning moments with the ptarmigan.

Continued on page 31

Lava Cliffs
Kathy Holland

Western Meadowlark
Jim Esten

Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at https://dfobirds.org, or by mail.

DFO memberships expire Dec. 31; valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1. DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation. DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic *The Lark Bunting*)	$	25
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	$	_____
Friends of DFO donation (general fund)	$	_____
Hawk Watch donation (DFO community science)	$	_____
Total	$	_____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (optional) _____

Email _____
(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)

Check payable to DFO and send to:
Kathy Holland, 351 E Caley Ave, Centennial, CO 80121-2201

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